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Craig, J. K.
Conversion

CONVERSION:

IN A

SERIES OF ALL THE CASES RECORDED

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT,

DEFECTIVE, DOUBTFUL, REAL.

INTENDED AS

A HELP TO SELF-EXAMINATION.

BY THE REV. J. K. CRAIG, OXON.,

INCUMBENT OF OULTON-CUM-WOODLESFORD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

"Many great services have been performed, many glorious works are wrought by men, which yet are utterly rejected by God, and shall never stand upon record in order to an eternal acceptance, because they took no heed to keep their heart with Him."—*Flavel.*

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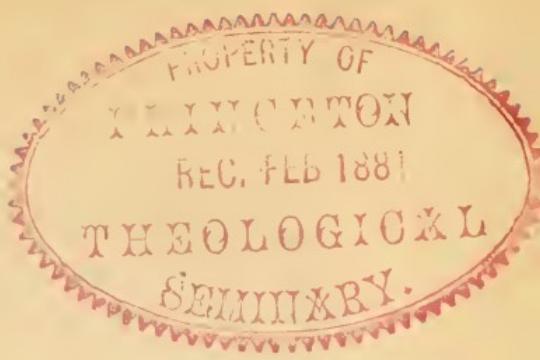
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SERMONS.



SERMON XV.

PART III.

GENUINE CONVERSION. DIST. I. MORAL. SEC. I.

NATHANAEL.*

*Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.—
John i. part of ver. 47.*

WE now approach that part of our course of subjects which embraces the particular cases recorded in the New Testament of *real and satisfactory conversion*. The cases hitherto considered have been those, in the *first* place, which are clearly pronounced in Scripture to have been *defective* of conversion, or, *secondly*, those which, however encouraging in outward appearance, were still of a *doubtful*, uncertain, compromising

* Probably the same as Bartholomew, and one of the Baptist's hearers. St John, who mentions Nathanael, does not name Bartholomew, while the evangelists that speak of Bartholomew, do not name Nathanael. The tradition also is a credible one, that he was the bridegroom at Cana in Galilee.—See John ii. 2.—xxi. 2.

kind, as to what was the true character and where the course at the last should terminate. It has been so far my endeavour to impress on our minds the conviction that either of these conditions is a most unsafe one for any person to rest contented to remain in. The first is a state of inevitable condemnation.—The second is a state of tremendous risk and danger ;—the everlasting safety of the soul is periled and jeopardized on hopes, and fears, and desires, instead of its being in a state of evangelical security, and by an act of covenant engagement committed to the Lord to keep against that day.

There has hitherto been considered, then, one state of certainty in which any person may be,—certain wrath and condemnation ; and also one uncertainty,—that of the soul which is out at sea in the great concern of its immortal interests and final attainment to eternal life. Besides these there is only one more condition in which it is possible to be. In one or other of the three we must all of us take our stand. This, like the first, is a state of certainty,—a certain and positive possession of the love and favour of Jehovah. It is the state of real, evangelical conversion. The heart is truly turned by Omnipotent grace and redemption, and the person is made in reality one of that spiritual seed who have become the children of God through faith that is in Christ Jesus.

To such it has been granted to experience beyond deception the new birth by the Spirit. They have seen their condition as guilty sinners in the sight of a holy God. They have felt their need of a Saviour and of his blood and righteousness. They have fled to him for refuge. They have not been sent empty away, but the door of mercy has been opened to them and they have entered in. They are in Christ Jesus. They have given in their names before all the world as his

disciples ; and he has given them his Spirit to enlighten, to sanctify them, and to bear witness with their spirits that they are the children of God. Now they have the mind and disposition of saints, that is, the mind of Christ, now they are different from the world around them ; they are as different from all other persons as light from darkness. They are contrite, and humble, and self-denying, and pure in heart. They are innocent and undefiled. They have their conversation in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity. A holy and heavenly mind has been given them, by which their affections are raised from things on the earth to the things above, because Christ there sitteth at God's right hand. " As is the heavenly such are they also that are heavenly."

This, to speak summarily, is conversion. To attain to this state by the gracious operation of the Spirit through the love of Christ to our souls is to be converted. Surely it ought to be the question with every one of us, Am I thus converted ? Has this heavenly change yet taken place upon me ? O let me make it my earnest enquiry what it really is, that I may seek to possess it, and be saved, everlastingly saved, with all the elect, from the present evil and dying world !

Now the simplest and readiest way to show us the testimony of Scripture of what conversion is, is to look at the different examples, the particular instances which are there recorded to us of it. There we behold in those instances sinners converted into saints, lions transformed into lambs, publicans and harlots, unjust, unclean, and unholy, yea, even thieves and murderers, obtaining mercy, finding forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ, saved, and washed, and sanctified, and born again by the Holy Ghost,—"the kingdom of heaven suffering violence, and the violent taking it by force." And in these particular instances,

inasmuch as they are many in number and of great variety of kinds and characters, there is a word in season, there is something of special application to all enquirers.

These different features and peculiarities of experience it will be the object of this part of our work to present before us; and to lay down a plan of it somewhat at large to begin with, I shall consider the work of conversion under *five leading distinctions*, which are specifically illustrated by the cases we shall have to examine. I shall give them a name for the present, and explain them as we come to them. There is, then, in the work of evangelical conversion,

- I. A *moral* distinction,
- II. A *temporal* distinction,
- III. An *operative* distinction,
- IV. An *instrumental* distinction, and
- V. A *characteristic* distinction.

Before I proceed at once with the first of these, let me also add to this two remarks. (1.) If there are all these different features and appearances in the great matter of the soul's conversion, then it is eminently needful that we examine very closely and faithfully the spirit of our minds, that we may know, upon scriptural grounds, whether we are really possessors of saving faith and an actual change of heart. We must not, it is evident, compare ourselves with others and gather an assurance from thence, because perhaps our case is altogether different. We must not mistake nature for grace, or knowledge for light, or wishes for attainments, or impression for repentance, or education for conversion. We must not mistake that which is naturally amiable for the love which is of God and the gracious dispositions of the Spirit. Rather we must strictly examine ourselves by the line and the

plummet of God's Holy Word, and by the teaching of his truth, whether our wills are converted, and whether a radical inward renewal of the heart has yet indeed been effected in us. (2.) And then, moreover, the fact of this great and extensive difference of religious character and privilege should teach us to be humbly thankful for even the smallest measure of grace, and faith, and sanctification which the Living Head of his Church has seen good to bestow upon us. We are not indeed to be satisfied if we are out of the ark, and do not partake of these things at all: but if we are of the household of faith, though it be but as a doorkeeper in the house of our God, though the least of all in his kingdom,—yet if this is the place he has allotted us and he has brought us to it,—if we have diligently striven after sanctification with a good and upright conscience, and the state of progress we have reached is the answer which he has given us,—then here is a call for thankfulness—“Bless the Lord, O our souls, and all that is within us bless his holy name.” All are not apostles,—all are not eminent saints;—and still after this we may grow in grace and have a nearer approach to perfection, as life, and duty, and means, and opportunities, and all the exercises of time are gradually passing away.

I. Let us now then begin forthwith with the *first* of our leading distinctions, viz: a *moral* distinction existing in the cases of evangelical conversion. There is such a principal difference in many to whom the Gospel is propounded in every place and in every age. Some are like the thief on the cross,—great and grievous transgressors, or like the “woman that was a sinner,”—their souls polluted with unrestrained ungodliness, and their bodies with lust and moral crime; still these may obtain forgiveness and their sins though as scarlet be as white as snow. All their sin shall be forgiven them, if they turn as the thief upon the

cross did to the Saviour, and cry to him as he did, “Lord, remember me.” They shall love much because they have much forgiven them. But some, on the other hand, are like Nathanael in the text,—in the strict use of the words, moral, and righteous, and upright men,—“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.” There are some such persons in the world. And it is a painful point of observation, that often they are the most in darkness to true religion, the most offended and prejudiced against it, and although, in a sense, not far from the kingdom of God, yet unable to pass the boundary,—the boundary of prejudice and of self-reliance, which keeps them out of it.

Here in the case of Nathanael we have an instance of such conversion. It may be very profitable for us to consider it a little,—to consider what it was, the truth which was discovered to him, and the change which it wrought upon him. In order rightly to conceive of it, and to bring the whole of the narrative methodically before us, we must notice *two* particulars,

- I. *His previous character*, and
- II. *His present instruction*.

I. *First*, we may notice his *previous character*. I mean his character as an unconverted man, before he was brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. When we speak of character, as to whether it is worthy or defective, we speak of it of course in two points of view;

1. What it is *towards God*, or its *religious reverence*, and
2. What it is *towards man*, or its *moral virtue*.

There are many persons to be met with, who have either one of these but not the other. Nathanael appears to have had both of these features of character, and still, as we shall see, to have been an unconverted man.

1. Notice, first, his *religious character*. There appears, to have been in him religious *knowledge*; that is to say, a knowledge of the religion of his country-men the Jews, as it stood in the Old Testament. When Philip went and found him to tell him of Christ the Messiah, he addressed him as one who was acquainted, whom he knew to be acquainted, with Scripture truth. "We have found," said he, "him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth." And Nathanael, by his answer, discovered an acquaintance with matters of Jewish faith, and that he was grounded and taught in their traditions; "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" just as the Pharisees, on another occasion, suggested the same objection, on the ground of a sacred authority, concerning the region in which Nazareth was situated; "Search and see, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."—So that Nathanael was acquainted with the writings of Moses and the prophets; and Nathanael was acquainted with the fact, that of all the prophets that had risen not one had risen out of Galilee. Nathanael, let those who are wise in the head but not as yet fully softened or changed in heart remember, Nathanael was acquainted with much of religious truth but still as yet an unblest and an unconverted person.

Then, moreover than this, there appears to have been, in the next place, a religious *occupation*. There can scarcely be a doubt that the circumstance referred to by Christ, Nathanael's being under the fig-tree, was not the mere fact of his being there, for this he might

often be, and it is a more particular allusion. It would refer to how he was engaged there; and it would seem to be implied that he was engaged in the exercise of prayer. Then it was that the eye of Jesus Christ, as the Omniscient God, was upon him. For it appears to be in reference to what he saw under the fig-tree that the Lord pronounced him an Israelite. For it is in answer to the question of Nathanael, "whence knowest thou me?" which was asked because of what Jesus said of him, "Behold an Israelite,"—it is in answer to this that Jesus says to him, "When thou wast under the fig-tree then I saw thee;" therefore I say, "Behold an Israelite."

Doubtless, therefore, Nathanael, like Cornelius, was offering prayer to Almighty God: he was not only versed in religious knowledge but one that engaged in religious exercise. Nevertheless, there was something yet mainly wanting before he were numbered with the spiritual seed, with the Lord's believing people. He had yet to know Jesus Christ, the need of his atonement, the value of his cross, and the power of his resurrection. Let us not rest, then, in religious exercise, however correctly and however diligently performed. It is only a means to bring us to Christ,—it is not Christ himself. Let us not think ourselves to be spiritual because we pray, but pray that we may be spiritual.

2. Observe, in the *second* place, his *moral integrity*: the Lord declared of him, that in him "there was no guile." Guile, it may safely be asserted, is the grand defect of fallen man. The world by the fall is full of guile. It was by guile that it fell, and now it is full of guile. All the transactions of the world, all the concerns of human kind, are full of guile. Business is full of it. Fraud, and craft, and dishonesty, a false balance, or a deceitful weight, an injurious usury or

extortion, as far as a more or less easy conscience will admit of, are practised on every side. Education is full of guile. Persons are carefully taught to be unnatural, to deceive and to be deceived. Character is full of it. It is, with the most of mankind, but a part that is acted, a mask that is worn to be seen of men. Society is full of it. Civilities and compliments are used and exchanged, which those who use them neither mean nor feel. And alas! religion, as it is commonly called, religion is full of it likewise. A profession is made of belonging to the people of God, while he whose "eyes are as a flame of fire," looks upon the heart, and discovers it to be a whitened sepulchre or a painted wall.

Nothing of this, however, was in Nathanael. He was an upright man. He was an Israelite indeed. Jesus, who "knew all men, and needed not that any should testify," pronounced this of him,—"an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile." And still all this time he was not a saved, he was not a spiritual, he was not a sanctified, he was not a converted person.

Nevertheless this we must say, brethren,—well will it be for us if in that which has been mentioned we attain to resemble him. There is much in merely natural men from which those who are spiritual may learn many useful lessons. There is much in those who are spiritual which we cannot desire to imitate, but which we must grieve and lament for if not despise. It ought not to be so, but it certainly is, that there is often much that is lovely in the world,—openness, and generosity, and nobleness of character,—which is not to be found in the Lord's Church and people.

II. But now the enquiry arises, What was the reason that such a person as Nathanael was not a real possessor of saving truth? what was amiss in Natha-

nael that he did not yet know these things? Having spoken of his previous character, let us, therefore, approach the subject of his *present instruction* in Christianity. There are then *two* other features in his character which we must notice; *one*, which will account to us why he was hitherto a stranger to the truth;—and *one*, which will account to us how it was that it now became his privilege to know it.

1. In the *first* place,—Why was he a stranger to the truth as it is in Jesus, which he read in the Old Testament as a matter of divine revelation? Why was he a stranger to that atoning, suffering Saviour, whom Moses and the prophets had declared to him, and whom John had set before him, he being one of John's disciples, as “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world?” Why was he a stranger to this? It was because of *prejudice*,—because he was a prejudiced enquirer. “Can any good thing,” says he, “come out of Nazareth?” And what a speech was it to make! Such a wise theologian,—such a thoughtful, serious learner,—and yet to set it down as impossible that because a particular region was notorious for evil any single good could come out of it! What an evident self-complacent prejudice against the very nature and tendency of Jehovah's plan of redemption! for is it not the very gist of that plan that out of the most degraded, as well as the lowest of the people, redemption should arise, so that the power might be of God, and not of man? He shrunk from the fact of the divine humiliation,—of the Deity being vested in the manhood, and that not as one of the rulers, but in the form of a servant,—but as a Nazarene,—not exalted and magnified, but despised and esteemed not,—not to reign and have dominion, but to suffer, and bleed, and die.

And is it not so, alas! with too many now that

hear the Gospel of Jesus? The manger, the cross, and the grave of Christ, are a stumbling-block in their way. They do not perceive that it is the way which he has trodden,—the path of humiliation which they must tread after him,—to everlasting dignity, and life, and glory. They will not come to him as sinners to be washed in his blood, nor bow their proud looks and their infidel objections before the cross of the Redeemer, although angels are wondering at it, although it is the theme of the song of the redeemed, although it is the wisdom and the power of God, and the glory of the ages of eternity, when time, and the world, and death, and material existence shall have all of them passed away.

2. But it is time that we notice another feature in Nathanael which led to the removal of his darkness and prejudice and his final receiving of Christ as the Saviour of his soul. It has already been adverted to as a part of his previous character; it must now be adduced as the key to his present instruction: it was his *conscientious sincerity*. Although he was prejudiced against the Truth yet he was upright and sincere in seeking it; he was praying under the fig-tree:—here was the secret, he was sitting under the fig-tree, seeking, and praying, and thinking about Messiah. The Lord and Saviour, though absent from him in the body, beheld him there. He looked at his heart and he discovered him an Israelite indeed. He saw that he was earnestly seeking, that he was praying in spirit and in truth, and he caused that Philip should go to him. Probably this was itself an immediate answer to his supplication. Having heard the Baptist concerning Jesus, he might be praying that God would reveal the truth to him, whatever it were, on which he must build his hopes and trust his safety for the future world. Just at the moment, while he was thus occupied, Philip came and called him:—“We have

found the Messiah ; him of whom Moses and the prophets did write. Come and see." Nathanael came to Jesus.

3. And now just perceive and notice the points of *instruction* which the Lord imparted to him. There was, *first*, his Deity as the Son of God. He discovered this to Nathanael by the attributes of omniscience and omnipresence. "Whence," said Nathanael, "knowest thou me?" And when the Lord had explained it, then he confessed his divinity, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God." Then, *next*, Nathanael having seen and admitted his divinity, that he was "the Son of God," the Saviour brought him to the knowledge of his manhood incarnation as the "Son of Man" to be the "one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." "Rabbi," said Nathanael, "thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel;"—it was easy for such a mind to acknowledge his greatness and dignity, not so his humiliation ;—but, replied Jesus, "Hereafter thou shalt see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of *Man*,"—as if he had said, Yea, thou shalt see them doing homage to my despised humanity ;—the way of connexion between heaven and earth is opened, which Jacob saw in the vision of ancient days ;—God and man are united in the flesh of the Manhood Word, and angels in him are made ministers to the heirs of eternal salvation,—“ascending, descending upon him ;”—and the kingdom of heaven in him is opened to all believers ;—he, the Son of God, has become the Son of Man, that they, the sons of men, might become the sons of God.

In conclusion :—My dear brethren, is it your earnest and sincere desire to know the truth as it was declared to Nathanael? Is your heart so prepared and disciplined by heavenly grace, as it is with every child of God, that you are seeking after truth above

all created benefits, that you are feeling and groping after Christ, and wishing to believe in him, and thirsting for the full revelation of the mystery of his incarnation, and waiting and desiring to be washed in his precious blood? And is it a fact that you do, like Nathanael, perhaps not under the fig-tree but in your secret retirement, pray to the Father to reveal his Son in you, to form Christ in you as the hope of glory? Does Jesus Christ ever look out of heaven through the ceiling of your room, and see your eye lifted up to him in earnest supplication, in strong crying and tears, that he would manifest himself to you as he does not to the world, and say to your soul, I am thy salvation? Then, beloved brethren, you shall find the Saviour. Receive the assurance that you shall certainly find the Saviour. You shall certainly believe in him. You shall certainly be safe in him before you die. And let me now, like St. Philip to Nathanael, deliver the message of revelation to you, "Come and see him." We have found him; we have been admitted to his saving health;—come and we will tell you what the Lord has done for us. Come and behold him. Come and listen to his word. Come and receive his testimony. Acquaint yourself with him and be at peace. Do not live on in life without a Saviour, with sin unpardoned, and wrath and curse upon you. Do not live away from the Father, away from truth, and happiness and salvation. Behold, the Messiah is come to you. He offers and waits to receive you. He desires to pardon your sins and to wash them away in his blood, and to reconcile you to Jehovah. He, as he said to Nathanael, is the ladder from earth to heaven, the communication between them. The angels of God are ascending and descending upon him. The means of connexion and fellowship with God, and with heaven, and angels and all the redeemed, are opened for you in Jesus Christ. The glory of Christ is manifested in that mediation; and at last it will be per-

fectly completed and exhibited in the glory of his kingdom, and the triumphant coming of the judgment-day. Then he shall come with those "mighty angels in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,"—"thousand thousands ministering unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand then will stand before him."

Beloved brethren,—will you not come to such a Saviour, and join yourselves to him in his death, that you may be like him in the likeness of his resurrection? Will you not trust the word of Jehovah by faith, and receive the record, that he has given you eternal life, and that this life is in his Son? Will you not return to the Father by him, and have a delightful fellowship with him, as blessed children, and with his Son Jesus Christ? The power is his to achieve this for you, if you will hear his voice, if you will receive his invitation, and come to him. Then this is the advice that we offer you,—Do as Nathanael did, he came when Philip called him. And this is the message we bring you,—the message of Philip to Nathanael,—“The Messiah is found for you, Come and see.”

SERMON XVI.

DIST. I. MORAL. SEC. II. EXAM. I.

THE DYING THIEF.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.—Luke xxiii. 42, 43.

THE first of our leading distinctions in the great matter of saving conversion was begun to be considered at our last opportunity. It was stated to be a *moral* distinction ; it comprises the difference which there is in the conversion of different persons, as to all its signs and appearances, its difficulties or its facilities, owing to the difference which previously exists in the natural moral character ; some of them being, as to external and earthly circumstances, virtuous and upright,—others, on the contrary, sinners of a multitude of sins, and defiled with criminal enormity. I have spoken of the first of these characters in the case of Nathanael of Cana, who, before he was converted to Christ, was “an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile.” And now, as the first of our examples to illustrate the opposite character, let us turn our thoughts to the case recorded in the text,—the penitent thief upon the cross ;—distinct

from Nathanael in moral condition and conduct, but each of them needing the same efficiency of grace, the same forgiveness of iniquity, and the same operation of the Holy Spirit, to convert and sanctify the heart, and to make them heirs of the kingdom.

The narrative is a short one ;—but, nevertheless, in order to make a profitable use of it, there are *four* particular purposes to which it ought to apply ;

- I. *To illustrate a doctrine,*
- II. *To specify a character,*
- III. *To suggest an admonition,*
- And then, after these reserves,
- IV. *To afford a most gracious encouragement.*

I. Let us first consider the narrative to *illustrate* to us a most important point of *doctrine* ;—that point of doctrine, I mean, which is the peculiar point of revelation, brought to light to this world by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even the forgiveness of sins :—that Almighty God has placed himself in the Gospel, that he has taken particular pains to place himself in the Gospel before all his creatures, before all flesh, Barbarian, Scythian, bond, or free, in this point of view,—that he was “in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses,”—that through the man Christ Jesus he has caused to be “preached to all nations the remission of sins,”—that “there is joy in heaven, amongst the angels of God, over every one sinner that repenteth,”—and that it is the work of the Church upon earth, and of the Word of Truth in the Church, just to preach that Gospel, in a dying world,—to “preach it to every creature,” that he that believes it may be saved. This is the doctrine. And this, I say, is illustrated to us, in the narrative before us, in the pardon, and acceptance, and the eternal salvation of this expiring penitent.

1. It illustrates its *freeness*;
2. It illustrates its *foundation*;
3. And it illustrates its *security*.

1. *First*, it illustrates its freeness,—the freeness, I mean, of the Divine forgiveness. For just consider for a moment, who was the individual upon whom the forgiveness came? It was a dying thief;—one that was adjudged by the Roman law to endure the most degrading of Roman punishments, to be transfixed upon the cross. Had he any works of righteousness which he had done, to recommend him to forgiveness? His crimes, on the contrary, of actual moral guilt had brought him to this condemnation. Was there, perhaps then, a hope that, for some remainder of time, he might repair, like Zaccheus, the wrongs that he had done, by restoring fourfold, or make some amends to his Maker by a more upright and innocent conduct? His days upon earth, on the contrary, were brought to a close: the suffering of death was upon him, and another sun should never rise upon his head. Was it then a feeling of repentance that recommended him to mercy, and, as some persons vainly suppose that it can do, purchased, as it were like a penance, the pardon of his iniquities? It was not so, brethren; for the other evangelists tell us that even while he was upon the cross, that is, for some time after he was upon the cross, he was reviling, along with the other malefactor, the Lord that was crucified before him.* The compassion of Christ, therefore, in turning his heart, must have preceded his repentance, and not his repentance have procured the compassion of Christ. Or was it, then, because he believed, because he had faith, that he got forgiveness, as if this was a work of his own or a meritorious means? Faith he had none, brethren, after he was nailed upon the cross; for while the unbelieving

* Mark xv. 32.

Jews were cavilling and saying, “*if thou be the king of Israel,*” “*if thou be the Son of God,*” the “*thieves that were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth.*”* Why then, we naturally ask, did this sudden change take place in this malefactor? How was it that, as we shall presently see, repentance was given him, and faith was given him, and forgiveness was given him, and the promise and assurance was given him, of eternal life in heaven? There is no other cause to be assigned for it but that which it plainly teaches us, the utterly unmerited *freeness* of the divine forgiveness; “*not by works of righteousness which we have done,*” but according to his own purpose, according to the riches of his grace.

2. And, then I say, it illustrates the cause, the *foundation*, of the forgiveness of sins. What is that cause? It is to glorify Christ,—that is the principle,—it is to glorify Christ. The cause, the foundation of the sinner’s forgiveness, of the remission of sins being freely given in the Gospel, is that Christ may be glorified, that “*the Father may be glorified in the Son.*” This was very plainly the reason that was in operation for the sudden conversion of the dying malefactor. He was to be selected as an instance of the object and design of that suffering which the Lord was then undergoing. He, as a pardoned, converted sinner, must bear a testimony for his dying Lord: the humiliation of Jesus was always attended with honour put upon him from on high;—when he lay in the Bethlehem manger, a chorus of angels chaunted the song of his nativity; when he came to Jerusalem meek and sitting on an ass, from the very babes and sucklings there was perfected praise; when the Pharisees were resisting and insulting him, one faithful disciple poured out her precious ointment upon him, or another came and washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them

* Matt. xxvii. 44.

with the hairs of her head ; and now that he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, the soul of this transgressor was given to him by the Father, and from being one moment previous an avowed, rebellious blasphemer, became a trophy of his grace, and a manifest token of his redemption. He that with one breath was reviling him must justify him in the next, "This man hath done nothing amiss,"* and the language of profaneness must be turned to the language of prayer, "Lord remember me ;" and the scoff of infidelity must be succeeded by the confession of faith ;—in one breath, "*if thou be the king of Israel,*" in the next, "*When thou comest to thy kingdom.*"

This is a point of great importance to a sceptical, reasoning mind. Why should God, you will say, make his forgiveness of offenders so cheap, and free, and unconditional, so as to follow up a sinner, as he evidently does, who is not seeking after heaven but turning from him, and at last by an act of sovereign grace to bring him unto his family as a blessed child ? Must I really believe that he will freely pardon me without any regard to conditions, without any thing to be done by me,—yea, pardon me all my sins, so great and numerous as they are, and blot them out for ever ? You must believe this, brethren. And the reply to your objection is this ;—that this forgiveness of sins is not a prodigal, causeless licentiousness, without an end or an object ; but it is to glorify Christ, and Christ especially as he was at the time of this thief's forgiveness, a suffering, bleeding, dying, sacrifice. It is to glorify Christ upon earth before an ungodly world ; and hereafter through the ages of eternity it is to glorify Christ in heaven. There his redeemed people will be seen by a worshipping universe, and by all the principalites and powers, as the

* Matt. xxvii. 41.

precious travail of his soul, the purchase of his blood, the triumphs of his victory, and the jewels of his crown.

3. And then moreover, we have illustrated to us the *security* and safety of this forgiveness of sins. It rests on the word of the Saviour himself, which shall never pass away, "*Verily I say unto you,*" *Amen*, I say to you, "*to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*" And is not the same *security*, is not the same assurance given to each of us? "*He that trusteth in me shall never perish, but have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*"

II. But apply this narrative *secondly*, to *specify a character*. Who is that person upon whom this forgiveness of the Lord shall come, whose iniquity is forgiven and whose sin is covered? Is it without discrimination? Is that forgiveness come upon all mankind? Then how did it happen that one of these malefactors should be taken and sanctified, the other should die in his sins? It is offered to all mankind, but fact of itself convinces us, that it is not really upon them. Is the distinction made, then, because of something in the person, because one is better than another? Both these thieves were reviling Jesus, and casting the same in his teeth; and yet one of them was taken and the other left. Nathanael was upright and he was accepted; the thief was a dying malefactor, and he was forgiven likewise. How then does it happen that some are pardoned and sanctified, while others are aliens and live and die in their sins?

There is no other reason, brethren, given in all the Bible but that those that eventually perish, it is because they "*will not come to*" the Saviour, "*that they might have life.*" The "*grace of God which*

bringeth salvation hath appeared unto *all* men ;”* and it strives with all men ;—it strove, we are told expressly, with the sinners that perished in the deluge;† —and it makes some impression upon all men ; but they will not surrender that they might be saved. They continue to resist and to revile, like the one of these malefactors, and not to confess with the other, and to pray with the other, “Lord remember me.” Here is the whole secret,—those that are saved are saved by the grace that brings them,—those that are lost are lost because they resist it and will not come.

I say then look at this narrative to specify the character, who it is that shall receive the forgiveness of sins,—to specify your character whether you shall receive it. Has the grace of Jehovah in the Gospel of his Son, or the striving of his Spirit which strives with every sinner,—has this yet worked in you the character it worked in the dying thief? Mark the features of that character, and apply it to your own experience. Look at his *contrite spirit*; “we indeed justly,” justly what? “justly are in this condemnation ;” “we receive the rewards of our deeds.” Have you this spirit, brethren? Have you the humble and the contrite heart? He did not even pray to Jesus Christ to deliver him from the suffering and death of his body, but only to take him to his heavenly rest ; he knew that his temporal death was merited. Look again at his *bold confession for Christ*; “this man hath done nothing amiss.” Do you thus confess the Lord before men as your hope and your confidence, and take up his cross before them? Look at his *zealous reproof of his companion*; “dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?” Mark his simplicity of earnest *prayer*; “Lord, remember me,” and his *faith* in the Redeemer, “Remember me then, when thou comest into thy king-

* Tit. ii. 11. † Gen. vi. 3.

dom." This was not a little measure of faith. He saw the Son of God in the extreme of his humiliation. He saw him dying like himself as a malefactor to the world. He saw him capable of dying. And yet he confessed him and declared his reliance upon him as the Lord of life and glory, the King of heaven, the Great Omnipotent Jehovah. The apostles, who had seen his miracles, were all of them now disbelieving,—“they all forsook him and fled,” and afterwards the account of his rising “seemed to them but as idle tales;” but the thief, who beheld him in the humiliation of his death, even at that moment proclaimed him the King of glory.

Behold then, beloved brethren, the power and efficacy of saving grace;—all these fruits produced in one sudden moment by the Holy Spirit in the soul! a guilty, unjust, reviling sinner converted to a penitent, believing saint! And therefore the pardon of the Lord was upon him, and the promise was given him, “To-day shalt thou be with me.”

And, beloved, would you know, therefore, if this forgiveness of sins is yours? See if you have this character. See if you have these fruits. See not for them as the merit to procure it,—God forbid,—but as the evidence that it is really yours, as the proof that the Lord has loved you, that at the last you shall be with him. Are you a contrite sinner? Do you confess the Saviour? Do you, by your life and conversation, reprove and condemn the world? Do you pray to him? And while you are looking to him as a dying Christ upon the cross, do you believe in him as the King of saints? as hereafter to “come in the clouds of heaven, that every eye may see him, and all the kindreds of the earth may wail because of him,—even so, Amen?” Depend upon this, that this humble, contrite, supplicating, broken, believing spirit of this

dying malefactor is the mark of the spiritual seed, the characteristic disposition of all the redeemed, the saved saints of Jesus Christ.

III. But, *thirdly*, we must also just look at this narrative to *suggest to us a word of admonition*. What is that word of admonition? Do not delay, brethren, to receive the grace of God. Do not put it off to the future, to a time that may never come. Do not run the risk, which this malefactor did run, to leave it neglected to the evil day, to the time of adversity, or the dying hour. How can you tell, if you act in a similar manner, in which of their states you may find yourself, the state of the one that died a penitent, or the one that died blaspheming? Learn from this narrative, briefly, these *three* reasons why you must not delay,—

(1.) *First its danger.* Both of them delayed and resisted the grace of God till death overtook them. Both of them did so, and one of them was lost. If death should thus overtake you, you may not be able to think of the Saviour then, or of any spiritual thing. You may be called suddenly away. You may not have the opportunity which this transgressor had, to have a crucified Saviour set before you when you come to die.

(2.) Further learn from this narrative the great *unprofitableness* of delaying;—nothing done for that gracious Master who has done and suffered so much for you! Life gone by for ever in sin and the service of the devil! Now the night come upon you in which no man can work any more!

(3.) And further learn from this narrative the *costly sacrifice* of delaying. The work of sanctification is almost always a gradual, progressive work. There

is much to do in the heart for every true believer. How shall you do it in a dying hour, when the body is weak, and the senses decaying, and the time is short, and the powers of life are departing. O be persuaded,—“seek the Lord while he may be found,—call upon him while he is near;”—“let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.” “Now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation;” we beseech you, beloved, that now ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

IV. But, if you are persuaded to yield to the strivings of God’s Holy Spirit, and now to turn to him from the present evil world,—if you will look to a dying and risen Saviour, and begin from this time to cry to him “Lord, remember me,”—then, brethren, after the reservation we have made to you, let this narrative *afford to you a most free and gracious encouragement.*

Look at the character before you—a dying thief! and is not Christ able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him? Is it not certainly true, that whosoever comes to him he will in no wise cast out?

Think of what it is that is offered you in the Gospel:—peace with God!—reconciliation, and a sense of reconciliation, and an assurance of reconciliation to the Omnipotent Jehovah!—to him that made the heavens, and the earth, and all that is therein! now in the present life, a free deliverance from a guilty mind and from a sinful, unsanctified nature, to be holy and happy in him, and in his Son Jesus Christ! and in the life hereafter, to be with Christ in his kingdom, when the visible heaven and material earth shall have

both of them passed away ! then to be a jewel in the crown of the Redeemer ! then to be a trophy of his grace, and the purchase of the travail of his soul, as a happy spirit of light and everlasting glory, through ages and ages that shall never end !

The good Spirit of the Lord make you willing to seek this in the day of his power, and to seek it without delay ! O may you make the resolution now, at this moment, in the house and presence of Jehovah, that by the help of his Holy Spirit, you will seek for the knowledge of Jesus, and seek to participate in his salvation, that you may have the gift of his righteousness upon you, and the work of his grace within you, before you die !

SERMON XVII.

DIST. I. MORAL. SEC. II. EXAM. II.

THE “SINNER” WOMAN.

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thine house. Thou gavest me no water for my feet ; but she hath washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss ; but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint ; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.—Luke vii. 44—48.

THE condition of man in this world is, beyond all doubt, a state of distance and departure from God. The moral image of God has been completely lost by the fall. Communion between God and his creature was destroyed by the fall, because sin has separated between them. The favour of God is withdrawn and taken from his creature. Instead of the holiness of original nature there is indwelling sin and corruption, “the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, the lust of

the eye and the pride of life ;” and instead of the love of God as a ruling principle, there is the love of sin, and of self, and of all the unprofitable vanities of the present evil world.

This is the state of fallen nature in all that are born into the earth. It may perhaps discover itself in different degrees as to its outward manifestation ; so that some are more openly profane and immoral, while others, who are kept by restraints, or a virtuous education, or a mild and gentle disposition, may have much that is pleasing and of good report ; but certainly in all there is the same corruption. There is the earthly mind, the unsanctified nature, the creature independent of him that created it, and estranged and alienated from him,—“a lover of pleasures more than a lover of God.”

This is what we mean by the reign and dominion of sin over the creation of God. It has driven the love of God from the heart of his creature whom he made to walk with him in the light of his countenance all the day : it has put the love of sin and of self, the love of the creature, the love of the world in its place. It has taken the spiritual mind away, by which the creature could delight itself in God : it has put the carnal mind instead of it, which is enmity against him. And now because of this state, the creature is under condemnation. And let the years of life pass away without a work of transforming grace upon the heart, and there is only one end that can come of it ;—it is to lie down in hell,—it is to die as an alien from God, and as a rebel against him.

Now, in the great matter of conversion, it is certainly a question of interest how far the sinner has proceeded onward in sin, whether he has been a small or a great transgressor in moral evil ; but whether a small or a great transgressor, it is a still more essential

question, whether there be in his experience a contrite turning to God, an affectionate return of the heart to him, a penitent, humble bowing down before him. This there is not in the unconverted, but this there invariably is in every true believer. The state of believers is a state of real contrition. Their sin is seen in connection with the wounded body of Jesus Christ. It is felt as the thing which pierced him, and nailed him to the cross; as that which he bore in his own body on the tree. The sacrifice of Christ is the representation of sin. And hence the importance of the *first* distinction we are making, viz. a *moral* distinction, in the work of evangelical conversion; for while those who have less, or think they have less to pardon, will love little, those will love much who have much forgiven them.

The characters described in the text are of these two opposite kinds; there is a notable contrast between them to show us what is contrition, and to distinguish it from that which is not. They are the character of Simon whom the Lord was “sitting at meat” with, and of the woman that “washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.”

It appears that “one of the Pharisees, whose name was Simon, desired of the Lord that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house and sat down to meat.” He seems to have been a man who was not without some inclinations and leanings towards Christ. He showed him the respect and attention to ask him into his house. He meant to be friendly and kind to him, by providing an entertainment for him. He probably wished to be taught by him and to hear his doctrine, for when the Lord said to him, “Simon I have something to say to thee,” he answered him “Master, say on.” He had assembled others of his brethren, perhaps that they likewise might hear him. And he

seems on the whole to have been looking to Christ to obtain the forgiveness of sins, although at the same time, in a very superficial, and cold, and careless manner ; for the Lord comparing him to the woman that was weeping at his feet, described their state of mind as resembling that of two debtors, one that " owed fifty pence" to his creditor and the other that " owed five hundred," and " when they had nothing to pay he frankly forgave them both." Not that our Lord meant to imply that the sins of this Pharisee were less than the sins of that penitent woman, but rather to reprove him because he thought them to be so, because he did not discover nor feel them, because he thought his debt to be small and therefore loved little, for that he hoped to have little forgiven him. For " to whom," said Christ, speaking of Simon, " to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." But of the woman he said, " her sins which are many are forgiven her, for she loved much."

My brethren, how many there are that are just in the condition of Simon ! They respect the religion of Jesus. They are kind and friendly to those whom he sends to declare it unto men. They do not oppose but if any thing assist the cause of Christ in the world. They are willing to hear of his doctrine : if he sends them a message by his word, they will say to him, Master, say on. They will even assemble their friends and those that belong to them to hear of the doctrine. And they are looking in some little measure to the Lord Jesus as the appointed sacrifice for sins : but it is, after all, in a light, and a cold, and a careless way. They are not in earnest about it. Their debt is the fifty and not the five hundred pence, and so they love little for they hope to have little forgiven them.

But let us look at the opposite character. The
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Lord was sitting at meat in the house of this Pharisee. A woman who lived in the city came into the room. And before we proceed, mark what is said of this woman. "She was a sinner." That is to say, she was known in that place as one who had gone astray from the path of virtue and propriety, whose character was gone, whose reputation in life had been given as a sacrifice to the gains and the pleasures of sin; so that this was all that could be said of her, to the end of her life it would continue to be what was said of her, that she was, or had been, "a sinner."

But, my brethren, the Lord added one thing more to her. She came to Christ a sinner. She left him a sinner saved. He said to the Pharisee, "Her sins which are many are forgiven her." He said to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven;—thy faith hath saved thee;—go in peace!" Here then is a word of encouragement to those who are fallen in sin. Perhaps there are some of you, brethren, who, when you look back into life, have some great act of transgression that stares you in the face. Your conscience is wounded within you. The Devil makes use of it to scare and frighten your soul. Now then, here is a case put on record on purpose for you. If she obtained mercy, you may obtain it also. If the Lord, when she came to him, said to her "thy sins are forgiven," then he will say it to you. Come in the way that she came, and you will not be sent empty away. Do not look back upon sins that are past to frighten and keep you from Christ, but rather let them take you to Christ, that they may be forgiven you. This is the sentence which the Gospel declares unto men, (observe, not that they may continue in sin that grace may abound, but that they may come for deliverance from it,) "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men, and blasphemy wherewith they

shall blaspheme." Even the "publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God."^{*}

But then, my dear brethren, if you would get this forgiveness which this penitent sinner obtained, then you must be as she was. You must have the contrition which she had. You must feel as she felt, if you cannot just do as she did. This is the point which I wish most to impress on your minds,—the need there is of contrition, and the proper view of what it is ;—the way in which a soul must proceed, if it would find its way to the Saviour, and obtain the forgiveness of sins.

1. Observe then in the first place, the *determination* of the woman. "When she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, then she came into it." Think, for a moment, what a painful thing this must have been to her ! to come walking into the room, where these proud self-righteous Pharisees were assembled *together* ! She came too *without an invitation*. It is only said that she knew that the Saviour was there, and in she came. She came into the house of a "*Pharisee* ;"—one who thought it a defilement to come near to such a person, but even if he met her, would have said, "Stand by for I am holier than thou." She came while they were "*sitting at meat* ;" —when, if it were possible, it was a still greater fault to intrude. How could she dare to come in then ? What could give her courage ? Because, it is said, she knew that Jesus was there. Her soul was burdened with its sins, and thirsting for Christ. She knew that he was there in the house, and come what would of it, though she knew that all eyes would be upon her, and that all but Christ would condemn her, she was determined to come to him. The fear of man, or the sense of shame at such a public confession of

* Mark iii, 28. Matt. xxi, 31.

her guilt, could not keep her back ; the Lord might have gone from the city and the opportunity must not be lost ; she resolved without further delay to cast herself upon him. And she was not sent empty away. The Lord not only accepted her, but when the Pharisees would have reviled her, he defended her cause, and justified her before them. She was not ashamed of Christ before men, and he was not ashamed of her.

My dear brethren, endeavour to have this sort of fixed determination, pray to our Lord to give it you, that whatever be in the way to prevent you, you will seek after Christ, and seek until you find him. Let nothing keep you back from the Saviour :—the sense of unworthiness, the fear of the scoffs or revilings of men, the greatness of former transgressions, or however public they have been,—let nothing keep you back from the Saviour. In him you have a friend who will not be ashamed to receive you, but will fulfil to you his word, “whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” However fallen you may be, he will “restore your soul, and lead you in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” .

2. Again ;—Look in the next place, at *her deep humility*. “*She stood at his feet, behind him.*” It might have been considered presumption, for a woman in her situation to thrust herself into such a grave and respectable company. But her conduct showed it was not so, but only the sense of her need of Christ. She did not present herself before him, but, as if unworthy to behold his face, she came, and placed herself behind him, and at his feet. It was as if she would say to him, and declare to all that were there, that she was less than the least of all the mercy and forgiveness which she hoped he would bestow on her.

This is another mark which cannot be mistaken

of the really broken and contrite spirit ;—deep humility,—large conviction of unworthiness,—the bringing down of the pride of the natural carnal heart. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the lowly.” A sinner that would come to the Saviour must not be high-minded but fear. He must feel himself guilty, and plead himself guilty, and only deserving of condemnation. In the sight of God and of man, he must be meek and lowly in heart. Then he shall find rest for his soul.

3. Notice in the third place her *grief, and godly sorrow*. “She stood at his feet behind him weeping :” yea, so much was she weeping, that she could “*wash his feet with her tears.*” She seemed to experience what the prophet Jeremiah once wished for himself, for her “eyes were fountains of tears.”* And what did she weep for? What else could she weep for but for her sins? She wept for her sins, and she wept for Christ. She saw in Jesus Christ the appointed sacrifice for sins. And she saw the odiousness of sin in the fact that so gracious a person should have to suffer death for it. She was going to anoint him for his death, and she connected with the death which he was to suffer the sins which she had committed. And so she was weeping, and her eyes were fountains of tears.

Now here was true contrition. All we could say about repentance would not make it half so clear to us as the conduct of this penitent sinner. She was broken-hearted for her sins because they would crucify the Lord of glory. “True religion,” said some one, “is Christ crucified in a broken heart.”

I do not find that, in the whole of the transaction, she spoke one single word. It was silent sorrow,

* Jer. ix. 1.

groanings which could not be uttered. It was her conduct that spoke in every part of it, and declared the state of her heart ;—standing—at his feet—behind him,—weeping,—washing his feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head ; and from the time she came in to the time she went out never ceasing to kiss his feet !

(1.) Learn from this, brethren, that real contrition is not a loud and a noisy, a rash, and a rude and irreverent thing. It is a calm and a quiet, thoughtful, careful exercise. It may do for the worshippers of Baal to cry out and shout, and with loud declamation call to him, O Baal hear us ! But with the penitent disciple of Jesus, both the prayer and the answer are the still small voice. The deeper and wider the river, the more stillly and silently it flows, and makes every thing fruitful around it. It is only the little stream that is noisy and loud, which has neither depth nor continuance, but runs itself quickly away.

(2.) And another remark on this point : it is a bad and an ominous sign, brethren, if, when you think of your sins, you are not able to weep. You will scarcely find a saint in the Bible, but you will read of his tears ; yea some we find talking of their tears having been for their meat by day and by night. And God has remembered those tears. He has put them into his bottle. And each in their turn have had it fulfilled to them, “they which sow in tears shall reap in joy.

4. But *Fourthly*. Notice in the character of this penitent woman, her *great abhorrence of her former sins*. She washed his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Her eyes, which had been the instruments of her sin, were deformed with weeping and made water to bathe the Redeemer’s

feet. Her hair, which had also been her greatest adorning, was not plaited any more, but made a towel to wipe them. Her face was spoiled and disfigured with the grief and sorrow of her mind. It was as if she would take her revenge on those parts of her body which had been the causes of iniquity. It was cutting off the right hand, plucking out the right eye, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

And, my dear brethren, is not this the very thing which St. Paul desires the saints of Christ that they should do? “As you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to holiness, as instruments of righteousness to God.”* While a man is unconverted every member of his body is profaned as the instrument of sin. The eye, the ear, the tongue, the hand, the foot, are the instruments of sin; and when the work of grace is effected, they must each have part in the transformation. They must all be regenerate as instruments of righteousness to God.

5. Lastly, observe her *love and reverence for Christ*. She stood at his feet, the place for a disciple,—the place for a humble worshipper. “From the time she came in, she had not ceased to kiss his feet.” And she brought of that precious “ointment,” which was kept in the “box of alabaster,” and the value of which was several pounds, and anointed the Lord for his approaching suffering. Jesus himself, when comparing her conduct with that of the Pharisee Simon, himself declared that she had “loved much.”

And this I would therefore remark, brethren, is another great mark of contrition;—*love to the Redeemer*. It is another step in that approach which a soul must make to the Saviour if it would not come to

* Rom. vi.

him in vain, if it would not be sent empty away, but obtain the divine forgiveness. The contrite heart is a heart that is awakened to the love of Jesus Christ. It sees in Jesus Christ the author of pardon and peace, the suffering Saviour for its sins, and for the world's transgressions ; and it comes to him with love and with strong desire, with reverence and godly fear. It looks at his Godhead, and humbly worships and adores him. It looks at his humanity, and feels a freedom of approach, an invitation of nearness, and a holy-fellowship of love. And in the graciousness of his character, the conviction of his readiness to receive the penitent soul ; in the "grace that is poured into his lips," it discovers the "chief among ten thousand," its "friend and its beloved," yea, "altogether lovely," and "fairer than the children of men."

I shall now conclude our subject by applying to *two* different descriptions of persons the decision which was made by Christ upon the character of this penitent woman and the character of Simon in whose house he was.

(1.) And *first* the decision which he made on the *character of Simon*. We have noticed already that he had shown some degree of respect and civility to Christ. And Christ seems to have taken some pains with him to instruct him better in the things which pertained to his kingdom. Still nevertheless he was blind and in darkness : he did not understand the very nature of the Gospel as a scheme of grace and salvation to a lost and guilty world. He does not seem to have felt his need of it himself, for although he treated the Lord with some outward and decent respect, yet he had not valued and esteemed him as he ought, but, as the Lord reminded him, he had loved him little. He had, it is true, invited him to his house, but he was not aware of the privilege which he en-

joyed, to have one who was God as well as man to sit down with him at his table. He had made an entertainment for him, but so little did he love him, that he had forgotten to show to him the common civilities of life : “I entered into thy house: thou gavest me no *water* for my feet; but she hath washed them with *tears* and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss ;” no not even to my *face*, and not even *one*; “but she,” *all the time* I have been here, “hath not ceased to kiss” not my face but “*my feet*. Thou didst not anoint even my *head* with” the cheapest and commonest “*oil*; but she hath anointed” not my head but “*my feet* with” the most costly and expensive “*ointment*.” She indeed hath “loved much and her many sins are forgiven.” Thou hast thought to have little forgiven thee, and so thou hast “loved me little.”

And then observe that he had not only felt little care about Christ for himself, but he was envious and jealous of the freedom of Christ with the woman and the favour he showed to her:—“this man, if he had been a prophet, would have known what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.”

Now then, my brethren, this part of our subject, this character of Simon and Christ’s decision upon it, applies itself to those who are just in the state in which he was. Are there not some I am speaking to who are not yet awake as they should be to the proper character of the Lord Jesus? Is it not true, brethren, that you have not yet felt your need of him as the only Saviour from sin? Is it not true that you have not discovered nor felt your sins as you ought to feel them? Rather have you not counted that your debt to the Lord is only the fifty not the five hundred pence? If you examine your heart, must you not acknowledge that from morning to night sin does not grieve you? that perhaps you have never shed a tear for it,—never

in all your life? You have been for some thirty or forty or sixty years going to and fro upon the earth, a sinner in the sight of Almighty God, and yet have never shed a tear for your sin. And if this is the case, then is it not likewise true, that you have little love to the Redeemer? You cannot receive, you do not understand his proper character and work. You have not fled to him for refuge as your righteousness with the Father. And therefore, like Simon, though you wish, perhaps, to respect him, you treat him with coldness and neglect. "Thou gavest me no water for my feet; thou gavest me no kiss; my head thou didst not anoint." And then is it not true, that you are envious and angry with those who have lived a less careful and upright life than you have, but who, because they are penitent, are welcomed to Christ, and go into the kingdom of God before you?

My brethren, these are marks of a dark and dangerous state,—marks that you are blind to the real design of the gospel,—marks that you are strangers to its comforts, that the Lord has not shown you his covenant, and this his secret is not with you. Believe me, you must repent of all this that the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. You must become a contrite and penitent sinner before you can come unto Christ. You must have contrition and godly sorrow for sin. You have much to be stripped of, much to undo, and unsay, and unthink. You have yet to pass through the needle's eye. In short, to be plain, you have yet to cast away your pride, and self-righteousness, and every refuge of lies. Then Christ will be lovely and great in your estimation. You will hunger and thirst for his righteousness, and you will surely be filled.

(2.) Finally, a word of application to the *contrite, penitent* disciple. Are there not some (the Lord grant

that there are) whose experience agrees with the points that have been noticed in the character of this penitent woman? My friends, I have no desire to point out particular sins, nor yet the length or degree to which perhaps they have been indulged. This is a matter between the soul and its God. I know a venerable minister who once fell into transgression and who has since directed in his will that this inscription should be written on his tomb, "Whatever I was in time will be known in the day of judgment." And even that is a humbling thought,—that all our transgressions will then be declared to the gathered universe of God. "There is nothing secret which shall not be revealed, and hid which shall not be known."*

But, brethren, this I would ask of you, Can you understand the experience which has been at this time described to you? Have you come to the determination that you must and will go to the Saviour? that you have no other refuge to flee to? and that neither life, nor death, nor principalities, nor powers, nor any other creature shall keep you from him? that every idol shall be sacrificed and every sin given up for his name's sake? Have you felt and experienced that deep humility we spoke of? that weeping and mourning for sin? that heartfelt abhorrence and hatred of former transgressions? O are you grieving in secret because of your many sins? Is your spirit bruised and broken, and your heart wounded within you? And while you see the vileness and baseness of sin in the wounded body of Jesus Christ, do you at the same time discover his gracious character; that he is your friend, and your refuge, and able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him? Are you willing to go to him, and, if you could do, to wash his feet with your tears and wipe them with the hairs of your head? Then

* Luke xii. 2.

hear the decision which the Lord pronounced in this case, “Her sins which are many are forgiven her for she hath loved me much;” and turning to the woman he said, “Thy sins are forgiven thee: thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” And be certain of this, brethren, that the mind of Christ is just the same unto you. If you thus come to him, then your sins are forgiven. Though they have also been many, still they are all forgiven. They are no more to be mentioned against you by God or by man nor once to be brought into mind. They are clean put away from you, blotted out as a cloud, removed from the east to the west, drowned in the depths of the sea. And, we beseech you, see and understand this. Do not let your conscience have a needless burden upon it, nor let it be frightened or scared with sins that are all forgiven you. “Wash away your transgressions, and rejoice in the name of the Lord. Though they have been as crimson they shall be made as wool, and though they have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.”

SERMON XVIII.

DIST. II. TEMPORAL. SEC. I.

TIMOTHEUS.

Fight the good fight of faith.—Lay hold on eternal life.
1 Tim. vi. part of ver. 12.

THE second distinction of difference which it has been proposed to consider, regarding the work of conversion, as that work is differently experienced in the separate histories of Christ's people, is a *temporal* distinction. It is the distinction of *time*,—either as to the length of that work's *duration*, inasmuch as, with some of the spiritual seed, their turning to God is a gradual, progressive attainment, whereas it is frequently with others very suddenly and speedily effected;—or else the distinction of *time*, with regard to the date of its *commencement*, inasmuch as with some the incorruptible seed is sown in the heart at the period of early life, who are afterwards trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord by educational and natural means, whereas with others there has been perhaps a considerable portion of existence expended in sinful indulgence, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, living without God in the world, and never thinking seriously of death, judgment, or eternity, but now they are arrested in their course,—they are

found by him whom they sought not for,—the word of power is sent to them, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

The text which has been read to you will lead us, at this opportunity, to consider the *first* of these descriptions of character,—those in whom the work of Divine grace in converting them to God is begun at the period of early life, and in whom it is also, as it generally is in such cases, a work that is gradually progressive,—a progressive enlightening, by “line upon line, and by precept upon precept,”—a progressive conformation of believing “from faith to faith,” and a progressive sanctification, “from grace to grace.” In short, the case that is now to be proposed to your consideration, (to express it in a single word) shall be *educational Conversion*. Certainly we see this exemplified not unfrequently in the world around us. And certainly it was exemplified in the case of the disciple Timothy, to whom the injunction contained in the text was addressed by Paul the apostle.

He had, we are informed in Scripture, for two generations of ancestors, a pious teacher to instruct him, and a pious example to direct him. His mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois had, it is testified, “unfeigned faith dwelling in them.” It dwelt “first,” it is said, in his “grandmother Lois,” and then, as she trained up her offspring for the Lord, it dwelt in his “mother Eunice;” then, by the same fidelity on her part, it dwelt in her son Timotheus.* He had thus, we are assured, been instructed, “from a child, to know the Holy Scriptures.” The things concerning salvation, the apostle reminds him, he had “learned and been assured of.†

* 2 Tim. i. 5. † ib. iii. 14, 15.

To him, then, we find the apostle, in the words of the text, and in many other passages, giving many and repeated admonitions to hold fast what he had received, to profit and increase in it, and by the help of that Holy Spirit by whom all the people of Jehovah are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation," to hold it firm unto the end. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee. Meditate upon these things. Give thyself wholly to them. Give attention to reading. Endure hardness. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life.*" In enlarging upon this, I shall make a *threefold* reference of the subject of *educational conversion*,—

I. *First* and principally, to the *younger part of the auditory*,

II. *Secondly*, to *parents and heads of families*,

III. *Thirdly*, to *the congregation at large*.

I. In the *first* place, that the sermon may by the Divine blessing be rendered more practically useful, I shall address the principal part of it to the younger section of the congregation; more especially to those amongst you, dear young friends, who are beginning to think with some seriousness about God and another world,—who are beginning to reap that promise, "I love them which love me, and those that seek me early shall find me."†

Addressing you, beloved, with much sincere love to your souls, and with very earnest desire for your present spiritual prosperity, and your future everlasting salvation, I would direct your attention to three important particulars implied in our text as far as you are concerned in it:

1. *Firstly, difficulties to be encountered,*

* 1 Tim. iv. 13, 14, 15. 2 Tim. ii. 3. † Prov. viii. 17.

2. *Secondly*, notwithstanding those difficulties, *a work to be done*,

3. And *Thirdly*, by consequence, *a blessed end to be attained to*.

1. *First* of all, observe from our text, that if you are brought by the grace of God to desire to belong to that Saviour who has loved you and died to redeem you,—if you are desiring to live to him and to confess his name before men,—then there are *difficulties* which you have to *encounter*. The life you are entering on, if you will follow Christ, is called in the text, “*a fight of faith*.” It is a conflict, a struggle, a warfare. It is called, indeed, for your encouragement, a “*good fight*:” it is good in its principle, and good in its uses, and good in its final victory; but nevertheless it is a fight.

I am not now going to mention those peculiarities of the life and walk of faith which make it a fight and a warfare to all the saints whether young or old, as much to the aged pilgrim as to those who are first believing, viz—that they have in themselves a deceitful, wicked heart,—that they have a world that is full of temptation round them, because it “lieth in the wicked one,”—and that Satan “goeth about in it like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” I shall, however, mention to you, my dear young brethren and sisters, *four* particular *difficulties* with which you have especially to fight, if you are fighting this good fight, this “*fight of faith*.” I mean that there are four particular causes why you will have difficulty in your religious experience. I shall call them by certain names, that you may be able to remember them. They are

- (1.) The cause of *imperfect convictions*,
- (2.) The cause of *feeble affections*,

- (3.) The cause of *interrupting circumstances*,
- (4.) The cause of *relaxing perseverance*.

Let me speak to you, earnestly and very affectionately on each of these causes of difficulty which you have to contend with.

(1.) There is, in the *first* place, the difficulty that comes of your having *imperfect convictions*; I mean convictions of the guilt and the heinousness of sin; I mean convictions of the guilt of your own condition as partaking of the nature of sin in the sight of God. You have had a virtuous, and a gentle, and perhaps a religious education. You love your parents and your families and you try to please them. Perhaps, like Timothy, you know the Holy Scriptures as children. And you cannot discover your sinfulness. You think you are amiable, well-intentioned, and good, and kind, and dutiful. But why do you think so, beloved? It is because you do not know your own selves. You do not look at your heart. You do not examine your secret thoughts. Therefore it is that you cannot discover in yourselves, what the word of God declares there is in you, "a heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked."* You cannot perceive that you are daily deserving God's wrath and curse. You cannot calculate the wickedness of having your heart and affections wandered away from him; and you cannot discover, that you deserve to die and to go to hell for it, and that if God should send you a sickness, and call you suddenly away, as he does a great many young persons, you would go to hell for it and there be lost for ever.

Here, then, is the first of your difficulties, in becoming youthful followers of the Lord and Saviour. It is that you feel perhaps in some little measure the

* Jer. xxvii. 9.

sinfulness of sin that dwelleth in you, the ingratitude of not loving God as his creatures ought to do, but you have no deep humbling views of it. You have not a contrite broken heart. You do not sufficiently see your guilt or your danger as a sinner against God, because you do not understand that the very principle of sin, of a sinful, fallen nature is just this easy, creature-loving, pleasure-loving disposition which you think so good and so amiable, whereas it is in reality a state of departure from Jehovah. It is a state of rebellion against him. It is a living without hope, and without God in the world.

(2.) And then, in the next place, beloved, there is, as the fruit of these imperfect convictions, the difficulty to contend with of *feeble religious affections*. Because of your small convictions of guilt and sinfulness, and of wrath impending upon you, you have not seen your need, as you should do, of that gracious Saviour who has loved you so much as to die upon the cross to redeem you. Hitherto, therefore, you do not love him with a perfect love. O, how has he loved you! loved you, dear young friends, from all eternity, with an everlasting love! But you do not love him as you should do; you do not love him much; you do not return his love.

Now, in regard to this matter of loving the Lord Jesus, I am going to point out to you a great mistake. It is this. There is a great difference between the *feelings* and the *affections*. Many young persons, when they hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, have their feelings greatly moved and powerfully excited. Their feelings, I say, are worked upon, and they mistake it for their affections. They hear about the blessedness and the future glories of heaven. They hear of the torments of everlasting suffering in hell. They hear of the dying of the Lord Jesus on the cross to deliver

them from those sufferings, and to make them hereafter blessed spirits before the throne. Then it is their feelings are excited; they look with tenderness towards the Redeemer, and perhaps in a sort with love, and they look with desire to his future kingdom and glory. But do they love him as a sanctified soul does love him? Do they love him with the loye of a real disciple, with a personal, spiritual, humble, contrite love? They do not yet love him so, brethren. They must feel their own personal need of him before he will be precious in their eyes. They must feel that they are sick, and find out the malady and moral disease of sin within them, before they will come to Jesus Christ as the great and Divine Physician. Then, beloved, when this is done in you by heavenly grace, then you will love the Lord Jesus; then you will desire him with desire; then you will hunger and thirst for him; then you will fear to grieve or to offend him; then you will "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Those affections of the natural heart, desire, and love, and hope, and joy, and fear, which are now so much occupied upon natural things, will all of them centre on the person, and dignity, and character, and kingdom, and glory, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3.) *Thirdly*, I have to point out to you the difficulty you will meet with, as young believers, from what I have called *interrupting circumstances*. Hitherto you are strangers to the cares and callings of life. The whole of its way, with all its changes and occurrences, has yet to be travelled by you. You are fresh and novice to it all. And O what a mass of interruptions! Even in the most innocent vicissitudes of life, still what a mass of interruptions is every parent obliged to anticipate to the spiritual interests of every beloved child! carnal associations! irreligious examples! engrossing cares and occupations! changes

of circumstances, residences, or connexions ! the probable effect of pleasureable allurements ! and the possible evil influence of sorrow that may happen, as the common portion of mankind ! and at last the being called in their turn to act for themselves in an evil world, when the eye that has watched them is closed in death, and the tongue that has taught them and warned them is silent in the grave !

(4.) And therefore fourthly, as the frequent result of all this, I must mention the trial to young believers of *relaxing perseverance*. This, beloved, is another considerable difficulty. You will almost certainly be tempted to weary in the way, to be weary of the sameness of your religious experience, and the length of your Christian pilgrimage, as a matter of faith for the whole of life. You will thus, I say, be tempted to relaxing perseverance. Nevertheless, if you have true religion, it is not a thing to be neglected. It is not to be pushed from the way by the opening occurrences, the cares, and the duties, and the calls, and the business of life. The warmer feelings of youthful zealousness are not to subside into stoical indifference. If you have true religion, it must enter into all these particulars and carry you through them all. And for this you must struggle and pray ; yea, for this you will unavoidably have, brethren, to struggle and pray, to see that it really does so, to see that religion does not exhaust and wither by its contact with the cares and the changes of life, but that it lasts and outlives them all.

Now then these, my dear young friends, these, we must say to you, are the difficulties lying in your course, if you would follow Jesus Christ ;—1. your *imperfect convictions* of sin ; 2. your *feeble religious affections* ; 3, the *interrupting occurrences* of life that

is opening before you, and 4. a consequent tendency to *relaxing perseverance* in the Christian pilgrimage.

2. Nevertheless, in the *second* place, the text declares to you, that notwithstanding all these difficulties, you have this all-important, this difficult *work to do*. “*Fight the good fight of faith.*” Do not relinquish it, or give it up in surrender. Fight it with good courage and “*lay hold on eternal life:*” that is, do not be content with a hope of eternal life, with a sight of it, with a near approach to it, or even an occasional realization, but lay hold of it,—have it in a close and indissoluble grasp,—possess it with a positive and a permanent assurance. But you say, how must we do this? I must take our next opportunity to speak on this more at large, in order that having spoken of your *particular difficulties* as young believers, we may notice your *particular duties* resulting out of them. Suffice it to say for the present that one thing is absolutely essential to every one of you who is really seeking after truth. It is to have such an habitual conviction of your own utter weakness and insufficiency as will constrain you never to fall into the least allowed remissness from secret, and earnest, and frequent calling upon God. Or to speak more comprehensively, it is so to order your time and occupations as, if possible, not in any one instance to depart from the close, and rigid, and never-deviating adherence to secret religious practices,—and those practices of *three* kinds. To speak briefly, remember, brethren, these three particulars means; 1. earnestly to *pray*, 2. diligently to *read*, 3. and personally to *apply*.—Pray for a new heart,—for an enlightened understanding,—for a converted will. Pray for a contrite spirit. Pray for a spiritual mind. Pray to the Lord to shine upon his word when you read it, that it may reveal the great mystery of godliness to you, and make you wise unto salvation. Pray that it may

come with power to your conscience, in the use of self-application.—Then it will show you your own heart ; it will deepen your convictions of sin ; it will show you your need of a Saviour, and bring you to him as your refuge, as your Justifier and Sanctifier, as your Lord and your God. Pray to the Lord, who alone is able to do this, that, for the sake of Jesus Christ, he will not leave nor forsake you till he has made you a real partaker of all that his people know of him, of all that his saints experience and enjoy ; yea, till you are born again and made a new creature in him, and savingly converted, and remembered with the favour which he beareth to his people, and visited with his salvation.”

3. The conclusion I wish to bring you to is that which St. Paul seems to have come to for Timothy,—that those who have learned religion in this particular manner, as a matter of teaching in early life, have most especially a need to be diligent ever afterwards in the regular, constant exercise of the secret means of grace. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee. Meditate upon these things. Give thyself wholly to them. Fight the good fight of faith.” Then shall you *attain to this blessed end* by the power of him that worketh all this in you, you shall “lay hold of eternal life ;” you shall have the assured possession of it here, and, after a little, its realized attainment in heaven.

I have only, for the present occasion, to add a few words to two other estates of my hearers :

II. In the *first* place, a word to parents and heads of families. Let this subject remind you to seek their spiritual welfare, to pray for their conversion to the Saviour, and by precept, by entreaty, and by example, to lead them soon to him. You can feel for

their bodily health, for their temporal advantages, for their welfare and station in the world. But can you not feel concerned for their state before God, their everlasting destiny in the world to come? Many there were, when the Lord was here upon the earth, that came to him in behalf of their children, and prayed to him for earthly things;—“ My little daughter lieth at the point of death, I pray thee come and heal her;” “ My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil, Lord help me.” One, however, there was whom, though partly wrong in the spirit of her petition, yet in the main of the petition itself we present to you as an example, “ Lord, I beseech thee, grant to these my sons that they may be with thee in thy kingdom.” Has such a prayer ever risen from you, brethren and sisters, to the Father of all mercies, to the Saviour that died in behalf of the children that God has given you, that they may be “ baptized with his baptism, and drink of his cup, and then sit with him in his kingdom?” There cannot be a more certain proof of an unbelieving, unregenerate heart, than there is in parents that never pray for the spiritual welfare, the everlasting salvation of their children. And surely there cannot be a more bitter ingredient in the cup of everlasting condemnation, than to meet such a child, as the fruit of their neglect and example, in the outer darkness of destruction.

III. Having lengthened our subject, I shall only add to the *congregation in general*, that if all this caution was given by so great an apostle to a youthful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, “ Fight, neglect not, meditate, give attention,” then to those of all other ages it is an argument from the less to the greater. The voice of the Lord at all times and seasons, and to men of all ranks and ages, times and nations, is “ Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be forgiven you,” and then, “ Give all diligence

to make your calling and election sure ;” “ Do what thy hand findest to do with all thy might, for the night is coming ;” “ Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you.”

SERMON XIX.

DIST. II. TEMPORAL. SEC. I.

TIMOTHEUS.

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babbling, and oppositions of science falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee! Amen. 1 Tim. vi. 20, 21.

I FEEL it to be needful to resume the subject on which I was speaking, chiefly to the younger part of the congregation, concerning *educational conversion*. By this, as it was stated, we mean the conversion of the heart, the turning of the heart towards God by Divine grace, at the period of early life, and by the gradual operation of an apparently natural and educational process. We found, as you will remember, an exemplification of it in the case of this disciple Timothy, whose ancestors, for two generations, had, it is said, “unfeigned faith dwelling in them,” and who by that means had known the Holy Scriptures from a child, and had “learned and been assured of the things” belonging to salvation.

There cannot be a doubt that of all the periods of life at which a sinful being is ever called, by the grace

of God and the love of a risen Saviour, into Jehovah's redeemed family as a blessed child,—of all the periods of life at which this ever happens, infancy, or youth, or maturity, or the eleventh hour of old age, it is far the most blessed to be called at the beginning of days; and when as yet but a child in years and in sin, to be made a child of grace and of sanctification. It is matter of peculiar mercy and cause for peculiar thankfulness if any, in early life, have had the sin of their nature forgiven them, and a holy nature imparted to them to be kept and maintained within them, before they have been practised in the secret depths of iniquity ; and if their eyes have been enlightened and opened upon God and Christ Jesus, before they have been blinded by Satan ; and if their heart and affections have been drawn to the Lord and Saviour, before they have been given to the present evil world ; if washed in the Saviour's blood, and changed by his spirit and grace, they realize the promise he has given them, “I love them which love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.”

But then with respect to these particular persons, those, I repeat, who have received the principles of religious truth in early life in a quiet and gradual way and as it were by progressive instruction and the working of natural secondary causes,—with respect, I say, to these cases, there are two important considerations, in regard to their religious experience, which I wished to set before you ;

I. *First*, that there are to such persons *peculiar difficulties* which they have to *contend with*,

II. *Secondly*, that there are likewise *peculiar points of conduct to be attended to*, arising out of those difficulties.

The *first* of these points, the *difficulties to contend*

with, was considered at our last opportunity: “Fight,” said the apostle to his son in the gospel, his youthful disciple Timothy,—fight (which implies a conflict) “the good fight of faith;” “lay hold” (which implies a struggle,) “on eternal life.” There were then stated to be four particular causes of experimental difficulty, through all the after-life, to all who have received religious truth in that particular dispensation :

1. The cause of *imperfect convictions*,—arising from the *limited experience of the guilt and power of sin*;
2. The cause of *languid affections*,—arising from the *limited sense of the personal need of a Redeemer*;
3. The cause of *interrupting and dissipating circumstances*,—arising from the *objects of sight*, the opening engagements, and changes, and connexions, and expectations, and cares, and enjoyments of life; and
4. The cause of *relaxing perseverance*,—arising from the *sameness*, and *strictness*, and *length of the Christian pilgrimage*, as a spiritual, invisible way for a carnal, material being, as a matter not of sight, but of faith, and yet a matter of discipline for the whole of life.

These are the points of difficulty generally operating to persons thus taught of God. These are the difficulties which, for the most part, try them and prove them, through all their future history.

II. But then, *secondly*, it is to be observed, that there are *peculiar points of conduct to be attended to*, arising out of those difficulties.

Now this is the practical part, and this there was not a sufficiency of time to speak upon properly and

usefully at the last opportunity. There was only time to remind you of one fundamental principle ; I mean, that in the midst of so many impediments,—in the midst of such a fight of faith, there is only one course for a sincere believer, for an earnest-seeking soul to pursue, viz : that in a deep and habitual conviction of his own insufficiency and weakness he must never, as he values his everlasting salvation, remit, for any period whatever, from the honest, the diligent use of those means of grace, *praying*, and *reading*, and *applying*, by which alone he lays hold of the strength of Jehovah, and comes within the hold, the everlasting hold of that promise, that none shall ever pluck the believer out of the Saviour's hand.

This was the principle which I wished to lay down for all amongst our number whose experience tells them that the Lord has been training them up in the way that has been described, that is, those who have not been suddenly and mightily converted in some dreadful career of sin, and so have been filled with strong and powerful convictions, and the terrors of the law, and the fears of hell, and have shed many tears of penitent affection, when the Saviour at last has said to them, "Son," or "Daughter, thy sins be forgiven thee;" but those, we mean, who have been quietly and gradually disciplined, as Timothy was, from childhood in the features of saving truth. The principle respecting them was this, that to all such persons, there is *much more particular need to be frequently reminded to continued persevering diligence in the regular use of all those exercises which are commonly called the means of grace.*

The need for such is to be *reminded*. The need to *use* the means is the same to all, but those who are, by the nature of their conversion, more strongly moved and excited, are not so likely, not so tempted

to neglect them. With these, on the contrary, the very gist of their temptation, the bearing and tendency of all their religious impediments, is to neglect those means. They shrink and relax from a steady, daily, continued, uninterrupted exercise of religious means, as an order of discipline and a matter of faith for the whole of life.

Now this you will certainly perceive, brethren, to be the principle implied in the whole of the general bearing of the writings of Paul to Timothy. They imply that this was his temptation,—that, as one educationally taught and gradually nurtured in the truth, this error of neglect was his temptation, and that though he was a man of God, yet he needed to be told of it and reminded by line upon line, and by precept upon precept. “Neglect not the gift that is given thee.” “Give attention to reading.” “Meditate upon these things.” “Continue in them.” “Give thyself wholly unto them.” Upwards of twenty times, in these two letters to Timothy, does the apostle Paul remind him to be diligent in the personal use of the means of grace, and concludes this first epistle, with this general direction, and prayer, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust. Grace be with thee, Amen.” From these words, brethren, I shall therefore resume the subject already introduced to you; and having then considered the difficulties, which the particular persons described will have more or less to contend with, I shall now, in the next place,

II. Endeavour to specify more particularly the *points of conduct resulting out of those difficulties, which such persons need to attend to.*

1. Here is in the text, *a duty, in the shape of a*
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charge: "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust."

2. Here is also appended, *a prayer in the shape of a blessing*, "Grace be with thee, Amen."

1. A word on the last of these first. Here is *a prayer, in the shape of a blessing*; "Grace be with thee! Amen." Each of these epistles ends with the same invocation. "Grace be with thee!" And for you, beloved friends whom I am now more especially addressing, viz: those whose experience is like this disciple's experience, your temptations and difficulties like his temptations and difficulties,—very earnestly and affectionately we join in this prayer for you, "Grace be with you! Amen." We join in this prayer for grace for you, for grace to be with you, for three substantial reasons;

(1.) *First*, because of your *utter helplessness without grace*. Do not in any wise suppose that when we presently propose to you directions how you are to accomplish this duty commanded in the text, viz: to keep the charge that is committed to you,—do not suppose that we mean that you are able to do this, for even one single moment, by any resolution, by any understanding, or by any strength of your own. Such resolutions will end in painful disappointment, for "without Christ, you can do nothing."* There may without Christ be the use of means, but it will be a form without the power, the flesh and the bones without the spirit, the body without the soul. It will be a heavy, burdensome ordinance, without enjoyment, or quickening, or spiritual comfort, or Divine assistance.

(2.) *Next*, we join in this prayer for you, that

* John xv. 5.

the grace of our Lord may be with you, because of your *sufficiency with grace*. Yes, be assured, beloved, that if you are simply and honestly seeking for grace from a gracious, grace-giving Saviour, it will be sufficient for all your need. He will “supply that need out of his riches in glory.” One of the attributes of grace is its sufficiency ; the Lord has said it, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” Yes, brethren, if you are even but the lambs in the fold of Christ, you are the objects of his favour, and that is an infinite and “everlasting love.” He will “keep you from falling.” “As your day is, he will cause your strength to be.” “No temptation shall happen to you, but he will make a way to escape it.”* If you are going daily, habitually, consistently, conscientiously to him, and are willing, by the use of the means he has appointed, to continue to go to him and to lay hold of his power, as long as till life is ended, then quietly and fearlessly you may leave the rest to him. He will do all his will in you. He will give you as much of grace and sanctification as he thinks it good you shall enjoy, and take you at last to complete and perfect it in the state of eternal glory.

(3.) And, therefore, we join in this prayer for you, “Grace be with you!” because of the *safety of grace, its eternal security*. See and consider that, brethren,—that if you are those that are using the means of grace in simplicity and godly sincerity, you are not only laying your hold on all the power of Christ, the power of Jehovah, to renew and sanctify your heart,—but you are laying inevitable hold on the covenant promises of Christ, the faithfulness of Jehovah, to save and secure your soul. Whatever be your measure of attainment in sanctification, whether much or little, whether more or less, of this you are certain,

* Phil. iv. 19. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Jer. xxxi. 3. Jude 24.
Deut. xxxiii. 25. I Cor. x. 13.

you shall “never perish, but have everlasting life.”* A real, spiritual disciple longs indeed to be holy and to “perfect holiness in the fear of God;” but however he has to lament for his defectiveness in that respect, nevertheless in this, his everlasting security in Christ, he has ground for strong consolation, he stands on a rock that is immovable, the promise and oath of the Eternal Godhead, “He that believeth shall be saved.”† Let us set this down as a certainty which never was, and never is, and never will be departed from, that a soul that honestly and diligently, habitually and continually uses the means of grace, and uses those means till life is ended, cannot possibly be lost in the judgment-day, that “every one that seeketh findeth, and every one that asks receiveth”—that a praying soul upon earth, (we speak not, of course, of a formal, outward, ceremonious prayer, but a spiritual supplication,) a praying soul upon earth is sure, inevitably sure, to be a praising soul in heaven.

2. And now, brethren, keeping in view before us this need and this sufficiency of Divine grace, “Grace be with thee! Amen,” let us proceed to consider the substantial part of our text. Here is then, in the second place, *a duty* prescribed to Timothy *in the shape of a charge*; “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.” We speak not specially of that part of the charge committed to him, to feed, as a minister, the flock and Church of Jesus. We speak of that part of it with which he was entrusted, and of which he is so frequently warned in these epistles, and which is common to all believers, the cultivation of personal religion, the keeping of that incorruptible seed which was sown in his own heart, and committed to his trust for his own growth in grace and holiness, that it might bring forth in him a hundred fold.

* John x. 28. † Mark xvi. 16.

Now then, so far, we bring it to this, that the grand essential duty of all those persons who have been, like this disciple, gradually trained and tutored in Divine knowledge, is to keep that which the Lord has committed to their trust. But now the question arises, How are they to do this? And in answering this question we shall have to specify certain particular *points of conduct* which they will have to *attend to*. We have shown that they cannot do it, that they are not able to keep that charge by any strength of their own, and that therefore they have need continually to keep to the means of grace in order that the power of Christ may rest upon them, and that they may have what the apostle prayed for for Timothy, "Grace be with thee! Amen." Nevertheless, while they are thus looking out for Divine assistance, in order to use and apply it there are these particular points of conduct to attend to. I shall mention *four* of them, which, if they be attended to, will make them not void and unfruitful in the kingdom and grace of our Lord, so that that grace will not be frustrated or received in vain by them. I shall take these two letters of apostolic injunction to Timothy, as the source from which to derive them.

(1.) There is first the *duty of avoidance*. It stands in the first chapter and the fourth verse; "Neither give heed to fables, and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith." And what these fables, and genealogies, and questions were, we learn from the verse of our text, "Avoid profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called, which some professing have erred concerning the faith." That is, then, avoid the allowed indulgence of a captious, cavilling, objecting, unbelieving spirit. Do not substitute curious, unlearned questions about difficult doctrinal matters for the practical truths of vital godliness. Avoid

a dogmatical, self-conceited prying into things which are not revealed—"the secret things which belong to the Lord our God."* Thou, O man of God, flee these things; flee these youthful lusts; rather seek for a teachable humble spirit—the mind of a disciple—the spirit of a little child, and in that way learn of Christ. Sit at the feet of Jesus to hear his word. Come to the Scriptures with a meek and unbiassed, simply enquiring mind. And then "the meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way."†

(2.) *Secondly*, there is the *duty of pursuit*. Instead of thus proudly arraigning and trying the doctrinal statements by the test of human understanding, which is the certain road to disbelieve them, and instead of thus raising up difficulties out of them or contending them into systems unfound in the Word of God,—instead of all this, brethren, pursue revelation as a matter practical. Be anxious to do the will as well as be wishful to know it. "Take heed unto thyself."—"The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned;" 1 Epis. i. 5. (and in the vi. chap. and the 11th verse,) "Follow after righteousness, godliness, love, faith, patience, meekness;" and (in the 2nd Epistle, the ii. chap. and the 22nd verse,) he tells us how we are to follow these things, "by calling upon the Lord out of a pure heart." That is, then,—Pursue the doctrinal truth by the means of the practical conduct and for the end of the practical use. This is the rule of revelation, "If any will do his will, they shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;"—"Then shall ye know if ye follow on to know the Lord." The belief of the truth is more in the heart than in the head. Truth is a holy thing, and it must be sought for in a holy way. It is to be known by practising, and not to be practised just by knowing it. We must

* Deut. xxix. 29. 1 Tim. vi. 11. 2 Tim. ii. 22. † Psalm xxv. 9.

“grow” at the same time “in grace” if we would grow in the “knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

(3.) *Thirdly*, there is the *duty of entireness*, (chap. iv. ver. 15.) — “Meditate upon these things, and give thyself wholly to them.” The Greek is, “Be in them;” that is, live your life in these things ; do not divide your heart, and affections, and occupations, between a holy Saviour and a wicked world.—So again, (2nd Epis. chap. ii. ver. 4.) “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” This, after all, is the reason why, with so many disciples, so little is done in religion. They have very defective views of the extent to which they are called upon to die to this world, and to be separate from it. They mix it up with their character, their principles, and their engagements. They do not “live the life which they have in the flesh by Christ living in them”—by faith upon his name.—They are earthly and carnal still, “careful and troubled with many things.”

Now, brethren, if you would prosper in religion, this must not so be. If you would “cease from sin,” you must “suffer in the flesh.”† If you would “bring forth much fruit,” you must, like “the corn of wheat, fall into the ground and die.” If you would follow Christ you must “take up the cross and follow him.”

(4.) *Lastly*, the *duty of patient continuance*.—(chap. iv. ver. 16.) “Continue in these things.” and (2nd Epis. chap. ii. ver. 6.) “The husbandman that laboureth,” and patiently waiteth for the produce, “must be first partaker of the fruits.” That is, then, look, beloved, at religion, not as a thing of sudden ex-

* John vii, 17. Hos. vi, 3. 2 Pet. iii, 18. † 1 Pet. iv, 1. John xii, 24.

ciment, and of speedily formed maturity, but, as we said before, as a thing for the whole of life, as a matter of regular progression, and quiet waiting upon God. Look at it not as a scaffolding just to believe by, as a vessel just to enter into and go in a moment full sail to heaven, but as a thing to live by in all the affairs and concerns of life ;—not, like Asahel, to run with a “foot like a wild roe,” to a soon and unprofitable end; neither, like Jonah’s gourd, to come up to perfection in one single night. Rather look at religion as a course to be steadily travelled from day to day. Gather the daily portion of hidden manna that falls around your tent. Sufficient to every day will be the evil thereof; sufficient also will be its grace. The Lord will feed you with angels’ food, but it will only be as a “daily bread.” This is the way to live as a Christian believer; not to expect or desire to lay up a store, as it were, of spiritual independence, but to live every day upon Jesus Christ,—to feed every day upon his covenanted fulness,—to desire every day the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby;”—and so to be gradually furnished to every good word and work, and gradually fitted and nurtured and trained for heaven,—carried “from grace to grace,” and “from strength to strength, till we appear before God in Zion.”*

Now then, these are the features of the Christian life. These are its points of duty. And to these we exhort you, brethren, to give your undivided attention. “If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things.” But for these we especially desire you to depend implicitly on the means and the power of grace. For these we offer the petition, “Grace be with you ! Amen.”

The life which these duties characterize may be,

* Psalm lxxxiv. 7.

I grant, a strict, and restricted life. There may be discipline. There may perhaps be monotony. But then it is a holy life. Then it is an useful life. Then it is a safe life. And then it is a happy life. And look to the end of it, it will end in glory. Begun in grace, it will end at the last in glory.

It is the end for which we were created,—to walk with God, first being reconciled unto him in Jesus Christ,—to be guided by his council and to live under his authority, looking up to him with affectionate confidence as a gracious, accepting Father to a saved, and a pardoned, and a blessed child. What, in this vain existence can offer an object so great as this? What shall ever profit you if you lose your soul? But this will profit you,—this, beloved, that we speak of is indeed to overcome the world. And to this there is power in Jesus Christ to exalt and elevate believers. Ask and it shall be given you, seek it, and pursue it, and live for it, and you will certainly find it. “If any man lack it let him ask of God. He giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not.” Jam. i. 5.

SERMON XX.

DIST. II. TEMPORAL. SEC. II.

SAUL OF TARSUS.

Wherupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the Chief Priests, at mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them which journeyed with me.—Acts xxvi. 12, 13.

OUR attention is occupied at present with that particular class of distinction in the work of conversion which we have marked as the distinction of *time* ;—that with some of the Lord's people their conversion to God is a *gradual* and, at times, almost imperceptible work ; but with others it is a *sudden* and immediate transition from darkness to light, and out of the bondage of Satan into the glorious kingdom of God's dear Son. We have looked into the first of these cases as it is exemplified in the character and history of Timothy. And we have noticed the particular *difficulties*, and mistakes, and the consequent need of caution and diligence in particular *duties* or *points of conduct*, with which a quiet and gradual conversion is for the most part surrounded. The same necessity there is, then, or perhaps even more so, to guard our minds by a sound scriptural knowledge

against the errors and the dangers of delusions in which is called *Sudden Conversion*. Where the work is quiet and gradual, the danger is *practical neglect* of it; where it is sudden and immediate, the danger is *ignorant enthusiasm*. In the first, the risk of mistake is to mistake an outward reformation for an inward grace, common moral virtue for spiritual renewal: in the latter, the risk of mistake is to mistake exhibition of feeling, enthusiastic animal excitement, for the working of God in the soul. Let us with this view, then, consider at this opportunity the instance of sudden and, we may say, miraculous conversion which we have in the case of Saul of Tarsus. I shall

- I. *First, make a doctrinal use of it;*
- II. *And, then, secondly, more at large, draw from it points of application, both of caution and encouragement.*

I. Let us first review the history as instructive in *points of doctrine* which it is of infinite moment rightly to perceive and understand. The occurrence of the circumstance is six times over recorded,—thrice in the Acts, and in the Epistle to the Galatians, and in the First to the Corinthians, and in the First to Timothy. They afford us when taken collectively a complete account of the transaction.

And let me just by the way make one remark upon this. It shows us the duty of *comparison*,—comparing of passages for the right understanding of the Word of God.* Let me say to my poorer brethren, yea, let me say to all, but to them especially, that there is much of this searching of Scripture by comparison, this comparing of spiritual things with spiritual, wanted and needed amongst them. It has been

* The close reader of Scripture who has paralleled Acts ix. 7. with xxii. 9., will see the intention of this remark being introduced here

remarked that every sentiment in Scripture is repeated in different passages at least three different times. Let the meaning of one of these be explained or enlarged by another, the difficulty reconciled, and the doubt removed. Let God, in the matter of his Word, as well as with regard to his Providence, “be his own interpreter, and he will make it plain.” This is the promise to all believers, and full of consolation it is to them, as touching all the trials of their faith, that “every mountain and hill shall be brought low, that the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.” But then they must be diligent in seeking this. In the use of the Word, as in all other exercises, it is the “diligent soul that shall be made fat.” Faith cometh by the Word, but it is to those who search it, it shall testify of Jesus. “Light is there sown for the righteous,” but it must be reaped as well as sown. Wisdom is there as a mine of silver, but as silver we must “seek for it, and search for it as for hid treasure. Then shall we understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” Taking, therefore, these accounts of St. Paul’s conversion collectively, we infer from them principally *three points of doctrine.*

1. *First*, we infer from them the *desperate rebelliousness of the unconverted nature*. Just take a survey of Saul’s character and conduct up to this time when the Saviour met him. Hear his own account of it. “I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Many of his saints I shut up in prison. I punished them oft in every synagogue. I compelled them to blaspheme. I was exceedingly mad against them,” and went out of my way, even to “strange cities, to persecute them.”* I persecuted the way, that is all the followers of Jesus, even to the death, binding and

* Acts. xxvi. 9—11.

delivering into prisons both men and women.* Yea, the Holy Ghost has written it of him, that he was “breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the disciples of the Lord.”† Like as it were some poisonous reptile, some fiery serpent, whose breath is a deadly stream consuming wherever it comes, so the breath of life which God had put in the nostrils of this Apollyon was a breath of murder and destruction against the disciples of the Lord and Saviour.

Here then, I say, we have a picture of the natural carnal mind, evincing that it is, what the Scripture has said it is, “enmity against God.”‡ It may not perhaps be readily admitted to be so, but nevertheless it is the humbling reality. It may be safely asserted and maintained that the heart of every man by nature is just what the heart of Saul of Tarsus was, enmity against Jehovah. It is especially as his was, an enmity against the Saviour. It is enmity against his truth. It is enmity against his people. It resists his authority. It practically says within itself, “I will not have this man to reign over me:” I will rise against the Lord and his anointed, “I will break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from me.” Depend upon it, brethren, this is the language of the great, the carnal, the ungodly, and all the pleasure-seeking lovers of the present evil world.

But, when I assert this, *two objections* are immediately started against it. (1.) There comes an *objection*, first from the *saints themselves*. We have no experience, they say, of all this bitterness against us. We meet with no persecution. There are no Sauls of Tarsus exceedingly mad against us. On the contrary, the world in a natural way are kind to us. They are friendly and affectionate. Yea, even some of that sect who deny our Lord will join us in good works, yea,

* Acts xxii. 4.

† Ib. ix. 1.

‡ Rom. viii. 7.

will eat of our bread and not lift up their heel against us. We read, it is true, that all who will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution, but our names are not cast out as evil, nor are we persecuted for righteousness' sake. What is the reason of this? What is the reason of it! why surely this, brethren;—that you are arraigning the Word's verity instead of arraigning your own consistency. "Let God be true, but every man a liar." You do not meet with enmity, you do not suffer persecution, not because the Word is not true that says so, but because you are not, as the Word describes it, "living godly in Christ Jesus." The "light is under the bushel." "The salt has lost its savour." You do not, like Noah, condemn the world. You are not bearing a faithful witness. The cross of Jesus is not upon your shoulder. His name is not upon your tongue. His blood does not stain your garments. His mark is not upon your forehead. His banner is not manfully unfolded before a carnal, unbelieving world.

(2.) And then the other *objection* against this truth, that every carnal mind is enmity to God comes from *the unbelieving*. We do not, they say, oppose the Gospel. We do not persecute the saints. We do not, indeed, exactly mingle with them, nor follow their strictness of life and character, but certainly this we know,—we have no antipathies against them. We are thankful to God for our mercies. We acknowledge the gifts of his Providence, and desire to live peaceably, to love charity, and to do good. How then can we be enmity against the Lord, and against his people? Are we not better than was Saul of Tarsus?

What is the answer to this, brethren? Why that the state of mind which such describe themselves to be in, when compared with the state of Saul, is not a better but a worse state. It is a state of careless-

ness, and therefore it is that it is not a state of opposition. Saul was a step in advance before you. He had been awakened from this state, and was, as he describes himself, "zealous" for what he thought to be the truth ; then began his opposition. That opposition evinced him to be nearer to, not further off, from the kingdom. Depend upon this,—that the state of a "Gallio who careth for none of these things" is far more dangerous and hopeless, than a Saul or a Herod that persecutes them. Depend upon this,—that a courteous, polite assenter to the truth as it is exhibited in the lives of their families, friends, and neighbours, is further from the kingdom of God, and more evidently going to hell, than one who resists and opposes the name of Christ and of his believers. You are not exhibiting, you say, this carnal enmity to Christ. So neither is the ground, that has the seed within itself of briers, and thorns, and thistles, exhibiting its produce till the season comes for them to grow. You are not persecuting and injuring the saints of Jesus Christ. But why ? because there is so little of the strictness and holiness of truth in their character to condemn your life and conversation. You are not resisting the Truth and Gospel of Jesus. But why are you not? because you are sleeping and slumbering, and "dead in trespasses and sins," and have therefore never concerned yourself to examine into that truth, and consider its claims upon you. You are thankful for your mercies, and live in peace and good will to all men. But why is it so? It is because you have all that you can wish for. You are living in comfort and sufficiency. You have an easy passage through the world. You have "come in no misfortune like other folk, neither are plagued like other men." The very God you are neglecting nevertheless crowns you with blessings. His candle shines upon your tabernacle. He causes his rain to descend, and the sun of prosperity to shine upon your head. But, as Satan falsely said of Job, it

may be truly said of you, “Skin for skin,—do you fear God for nought?—let the Lord put forth his hand, and touch you” in all your possessions;—let your gourds be withered, and your creature-comforts be taken from you, and fade, and die,—and then you will “curse him to his face.” And, then, as to the gifts of the grace of God in redemption, the unspeakable gift of his Son to vile, lost, guilty sinners,—are you thankful for this? It is only because you are utterly careless about it, that you do not rise in enmity against it, and resist the demands of such a revelation upon you.

But now having answered these objections, let us try to bring home this important point a little more closely, and to prove it a little more clearly: I mean, that the state of all mankind is this desperate rebellion and enmity against Almighty God, and especially so against the cross, the doctrine, and the people of the Lord Jesus. We shall prove that it is so, by showing *how* it is,—by showing, in the case of St. Paul, how it came to be so in him. So that being as it is a principle existing in the heart of all men, though not at the first perhaps openly exhibited while the truth is permitted to let them alone, yet it is like seed in the ground, which shall rise and discover itself when the cause that produces it acts upon it. There were, then, *two principles* which seem to have led, in the case of Saul of Tarsus, and which do so perhaps in all other persons, to this terrible development of the wicked enmity of his carnal mind against the Lord and Saviour.

(1.) The *first* of these principles was *self-righteousness*. The apostle appears to have been, even before his conversion, in earnest about religion. “He had profited,” he tells us, in the Jews’ religion, above many of his equals in that nation. He was more ex-

ceedingly zealous than they were of the “traditions of the fathers.”* And these things he plainly tells us he then “counted gain to” him,—and that he boasted in them,—but that soon he considered them to be only “in the flesh;” not the fruits of the Spirit but the works of the flesh: “If any man thinketh he hath any thing whereof he might trust in the flesh, I had more;—circumcised the eighth day;—of the stock of Israel;—a Hebrew of the Hebrews;—as touching the law a Pharisee;—zealous towards God;—as touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”†

These were the things upon which he placed his dependence. With a sincere but a prejudiced mind, he wished to be just with God: he was not like the mass of mankind, utterly careless about it. Nevertheless, however, he was justifying himself, and trusting in his own righteousness for a meritorious acceptance. And therefore he hated the Gospel, because it would take away all his sandy foundation, and throw down all his building;—because it came to him only as a sinner and broke down his refuge of lies;—because it taught him, what he afterwards most willingly confessed,—that “every mouth must be stopped and all the world be guilty before God,” so as to be “justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”‡ Then did he freely acknowledge, “The things that were gain to me, I count them loss for Christ,”—yea, “loss,” and “dross,” and “dung,” “that I may win Christ, and be found in him; not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith, so that I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and be made conformable to his death, if by any means I might attain unto his resurrection.”§

* Gal. i. 14. † Phil. iii. 1, 4, 5, 6. ‡ Rom. iii. 19, 24
§ Phil. iii. 7—11.

(2.) And then the *second* principle which led this apostle, and which leads other persons to resist the Gospel of Christ and discover their enmity against it, was *a dissatisfied conscience*. “It is hard for thee,” said the Lord to him, “to kick against the pricks.”* The ox was guided in ploughing by the goads or pricks that were used to urge it onward in its track: if it stood or resisted it only brought punishment upon itself; it felt the pricks because it kicked against them.—So said the Lord metaphorically to his apostle, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” As if he had said, ‘I have been urging thee onward.’ The candle of God has burned in thy conscience with a shining light. My Spirit has been striving within thee and my saints bearing witness without thee. My martyr Stephen, whose blood thou hast spilt upon the earth, died with a glorious witness before thy face. He preached the whole word of truth to thee. And then he saw me “sitting at the right-hand of my Father.” His face was as the face of an angel. The glory of God was upon it, in a visible splendour. And in the midst of the agony of dying, thou heardest him pray for thee. Thou art resisting, therefore, the witness of miracles, the witness of dying martyrs and living saints, the work of my Spirit, the work of irresistible grace in thy heart, and the stings of a restless conscience. Thou art resisting all this; but the work is “hard” for thee;—“it is hard,” it is difficult, “to kick against the pricks.” Such were the principles upon which this eminent apostle once persecuted the Church of God. Clearly, he resisted in a spirit of human pride the humbling doctrine of the cross. Clearly, he was also resisting the testimony of the truth upon his conscience, as it gradually testified that all his dependence was a false one, a sandy foundation, and a refuge of vain credulity.

But I am obliged, for the present opportunity, to draw to some practical conclusion. We have only as yet considered the *first* of our *points* of doctrine which the conversion of St. Paul illustrates to us,—the *desperate, rebellious opposition to the truth in the natural, carnal mind*. Let us gather up the things that have been spoken, to bring them to a closer application.

1. In the *first* place, we recur to the principle that has been mentioned, that the state of *careless indifference*, where the enmity of the heart is not developed into open exercise, is the *worst, the most dangerous state* in which a sinful creature can be. It is worse—it is far less hopeful than the state of avowed opposition; for when a man opposes the truth, he has found that “the words of the wise are as goads,”* and so he is kicking against the pricks.

It is a common expression, amongst religious people,—Such or such a person is well-disposed. It is said of the man who does not object or oppose, but is friendly and kind to God’s people. This, of all other things, is a most tremendous delusion. For what does this really mean? what is really signified by a person being friendly and well-disposed without being a spiritual person? Why that the saints to whom he is so have their lights very dimly burning, and that he, moreover, himself is asleep in the slumber of destruction.

Sin is a disease of the soul: and what will physicians tell us is the most fatal symptom of disease? Not, very frequently, the state of pain and activity,—though this is dangerous enough,—but the state of lethargy where the flesh is sleeping, or the state of

* Eccles. xii. 11.

mortification where the muscular fibre has ceased to feel.

Are there any, then, of our people, that have vainly trusted to this imperfect dependence,—that you do not resist the truth,—that you are kind to the people of God,—that you are hospitable to his servants,—that you make no objections to the read or the preached word,—that you do not prevent your families, friends, or neighbours, from making the best of their way to heaven? Well, but nevertheless, you have determined to live at your ease. You are resolved to gratify your earthly and carnal affections. You are letting the season of life pass away, and the morning of eternity nearer and nearer approach you, without any effort to save your soul. In business, and pleasure, and social enjoyment, you are wearing your life away. Then, my friends, your present condition we pronounce to be the most certain presage which there can be, that you will never be awakened unto spiritual life, but at the last lie down in hell. You have only to live as you do live,—just to continue at ease in a smooth and pleasurable indulgence, and you are sure at the last to lie down in hell. You may make some occasional, transient resolutions of amendment; but they will all be broken. You may grieve at some seldom seasons because of your present habits; but you will grieve for them less and less, till they are fixed and confirmed upon you. You may feel your compunctions and remorse; but you will feel them less frequently and keenly. And time will pass. The end of life will anticipate your calculation. The seed of disease, the messenger of death will begin to show itself,—and the judgment-day will overtake you. Then you will be found and discovered to be without salvation,—without an intercessor,—without a sacrifice,—without a Saviour to plead your cause. That Saviour neglected, despised by you now, will then be

"revealed in flaming fire taking vengeance upon you." Depend upon this, that the most awful warning in Scripture is "Tremble ye that are at ease;"—that the most fatal sentence in Scripture is, "They are joined unto idols,—let them alone;"—that the most certain state of condemnation described in Scripture is to be "given up to a reprobate mind, to strong delusion, to believe a lie."*

2. *Secondly*, the subject brings home to us the *futile weakness*, the *hopeless hardness of "fighting against God."* It is written in the prophet Isaiah, "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth."† And just consider what an awfully presumptuous position for a finite dying creature! striving against his Maker! Think of this Saul of Tarsus trying to blot out that religion from the world, which the Omnipotent power of Jehovah had established in it! trying to accomplish a work as easy or as difficult as to pluck the sun from the heavens or to quench the fires of hell! a man, single-handed, who held his breath by the pleasure of God the Highest,—yet hoping to destroy and make an end of his saints, and to smother that Church of which the Lord had spoken, that "even the gates of hell should not prevail against it!"

But have we not cause to apply this also to some amongst ourselves?—"woe unto him that is striving against his Maker." Are *you* not, any of you, brethren, resisting the Holy Ghost? Are you not wilfully, perversely, and impenitently kicking against the pricks? The grace of a gracious Saviour has followed you all your days. His truth has been preached and proclaimed before you. His saints have, living and dying, given and left you their honest witness to

* Isa. xxxii. 11. Hos. iv. 17. 2 Thess. ii. 11. † Isa. xlvi. 9.

the truth. Warnings, and threatenings, and mercies, and invitations have pursued you from day to day and from year to year. In short, it may be said of some passages in your life, that he has shaken you over hell, though he has not dropped you into it. But still you are what you were at the beginning. Still you have resisted the witness of conscience and the work of the Holy Ghost. Still your condition is a carnal, unsanctified, earthly, ungodly nature. You are casting yourself to your own destruction upon the “thick bosses of the Almighty’s buckler.”

Now then consider this word to this apostle, “It is hard work for thee to be kicking against the pricks.” It is not hard work for the Lord. It is not hard for others. But it is “hard for *thee*.” And reflect, from this case of this apostle, how vain and useless it is to resist and oppose the Omnipotent power of Jehovah! How strong was this exemplified in his particular instance! He had not been content with destroying the saints at Jerusalem, but he must even go out of his way, to go to Damascus to destroy them there. He goes deliberately to the high-priest, and asks for letters of commission,* and then he sets out to Damascus. But what was the event? The Saviour met him on his way. The Saviour that guards his saints had decreed that their sufferings should terminate. The Saviour that pitied, and loved, and had a purpose of grace even to this bitter persecutor,—that Saviour met him on his way. What transpired? The bare glimpse of his glory struck to the earth his feeble, offending creature, laid him prostrate on the ground, showed him how easily his life might have been taken away from him, and how, if the word had not been given him “Rise, and stand upon thy feet,” he might never have risen any more, but his spirit have departed, and gone down quick into hell. O how

* Acts ix. 1, 2.

often is the lesson repeated to us all, “What a fearful thing it would be to fall into the hands of the living God!” If but one glimpse of the Lord’s eternal glory was so overwhelming to sinning dust and ashes, what will be the vision of that glory of the Saviour to those who have died as they lived at war with him, resisting his authority, and despising the riches of his grace, and piercing him afresh with their sins, when they see him coming in the clouds of heaven, and all the kindreds of the earth convoked before him?

3. Therefore, *finally*, learn from this subject, what we wish, beloved, to deduce from every Scripture, and to speak in every sermon,—what every sentence of the Bible is designed to teach us, and all the Providences of our lives are designed to impress upon us,—learn from this subject,—the vast *importance of the duty* to “*be reconciled to God*;”—to be reconciled to God by coming to Christ as a Saviour, without deception and without delay. The offers of mercy are free. The power of grace is sufficient.—The extent of salvation is as infinite as the need of it is universal. So that it may truly be said to all men,—not another day need be spent without being reconciled to God,—without being happy, pardoned, saved, and sanctified. But then, dear brethren, do not trifle with such tremendous consequence. Do not neglect so great salvation. Kiss the Son lest he be angry and so ye perish from the way;—if his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

SERMON XXI.

DIST. II. TEMPORAL. SEC. II.

SAUL OF TARSUS.

Whereupon as I went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priests, at mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them which journeyed with me.—Acts xxvi. 12, 13.

IN the preceding three of this course of sermons on Conversion, our notice has been directed to the sort of difference which arises in the experience of the people of God from that class of distinction in the work of conversion which I have called the distinction of *time*. With very many, as it was with Timothy, it is a gradual, often educational, and always disciplinary work, before it can be said to be effected. With others, as with Paul the apostle, it is a sudden revealing of Christ and the power of his resurrection.

With respect to the first of these sorts of experience, in a quiet and *gradual* conversion, the object was to show that the peculiar risk which attends it is the declining of the soul at any time into an easy and indolent state, *a practical disuse or neglect of the means of grace* :—“neglect not the gift that is in thee ;—give

attention to reading ;—continue in these things ;—meditate upon them ;—give thyself wholly unto them.” But in respect of the other experience, in a sudden and immediate conversion, the risk and the practical danger, as it remains now to be pointed out to us, is in consequence of the door which is opened, by a wild and unscriptural view of it, to *ignorant enthusiasm and self-complacent delusion*. The design of this discourse, therefore, will be to take this conversion of Saul of Tarsus as the basis, and to specify rather particularly what are those points of delusion,—the mistakes which are made respecting sudden and immediate conversion. I shall do this in the hope that it may serve, by the teaching of the Spirit, to enlighten and fortify our judgment and guard our minds against them.

I. But before I proceed to this, we have a point or two of notice remaining in regard to the conversion itself. I purposed to consider the sudden conversion of St. Paul as exemplifying to us *three principles of doctrine*; and I have only hitherto, in the last discourse, referred to one of them,—viz., 1. *the dreadful rebellious enmity of the unconverted nature*. He who after became by Almighty grace such an eminent saint and apostle of Jesus Christ, yet, nevertheless, when he was in his natural carnal mind, madly persecuted his Church, shut up his saints in prison, compelled them to blaspheme, persecuted the way to the death both men and women, and was breathing out threatenings and slaughters against the Lord’s disciples.

And this rebellious enmity, however this may seem to be a strong and extreme instance, yet was proved in that last discourse to be the natural condition of every carnal, unconverted character. Although two objections are brought against it, one from many of the saints, and one from the unconverted,

yet they are both but too easily refuted. Many of those who appear to be saints, and in some small measure are so, object to the doctrine that the carnal mind is utter enmity against the Saviour, because they, in their contact with the ungodly world, do not meet with persecution. But this, it was shown, is because of their own indulgentness, and their own defective testimony. They compromise truth, and live by expediency, and mix with a careless, godless world. And then many that are utterly void of religion, still honestly feel, and can honestly testify, that they do not oppose or make resistance against it. They respect it, submit, yea conform to it, and even encourage and help it forward in the world. But then these, it has been shown, do not hate it because they do not understand it,—because they are altogether careless, and cold, and indifferent about it. They have not considered the cross of its humiliation, nor the claims of its holy character. Their state, it has been shown, is not better but worse than the state of opposition,—not a higher but a lower condition,—not nearer to the kingdom of God but one degree further from it. But whenever a person does begin, by the striving work of the Spirit in his conscience, to be earnest to seek after truth, then it is that the state of resistance commences. And this, it was shown by the case of this apostle, will arise from *two* principal causes; first, the cause of *self-righteousness*, or that very natural dependence which the seeking soul first takes to on its own sincerity and service, on its own arm of flesh,—a dependence which the word of revelation, the truth as it is in Jesus, throws down as a refuge of lies. “Touching the righteousness which is of the law,” I, says St. Paul, was “blameless, and counted it gain,” and more than all others, could trust and glory in the flesh. And the other cause, along with this, was the *secret voice of conscience*; “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” To resist

the strivings of the Spirit, the signs of miraculous power in the Church, the lives of living confessors and the witness of dying martyrs,—this was hard for him ; but this, till it gained the victory for truth, increased his enmity against it. And thus it was that this notable enemy of the Christian faith gave himself up to the Devil, to resist the Gospel of the Saviour, to persecute his Church, and to destroy his people. And thus it is that all who are unconverted,—yea, all of you, brethren, who have not experienced the power of religion in the soul, nor tasted that the Lord is gracious,—if you are not in the worst of all states for a dying creature to be in, that is, a total carelessness about your eternal salvation, led captive by Satan at his will, dead in trespasses and sins,—if you are not in that state,—then you are resisting the claims of the Gospel upon you, counting it a dry, and a dull, and a gloomy service, a discipline of bondage and restraint, disliking its holy character, rebelling in heart against the Lord Jesus Christ, and refusing to bow yourself down at his cross and to wash your sins away in the precious fountain of his redemption.

But now from this case of St. Paul's conversion there are *two* more *principles of doctrine* which we have to derive. We have so far only considered what is shown by his previous character. Now, however, in the work of his conversion, we have these two points established,—that there is in the conversion of bold and rebellious sinners,

2. *A most gracious restraining of Almighty power to prolong and spare them,*

3. *And a large exertion of Almighty power to convert and save them.*

There is a *restraint* of power for the first purpose and an *activity* of power for the second.

2. There is, in the first place, we resume, a *large restraining of the Divine power* in sparing and bearing with such obdurate sinners. What a solemn spectacle is a man striving with his Maker. A finite creature at war with God! What should we think of a man who should singly and single-handed resist even human power which “bears not the sword in vain?” But what is this to a man at war with God! holding his breath for every moment at the Divine controul! weak and impotent while Jehovah is Almighty! finite and dying while God is eternal and everlasting! “Look to the heavens above and the earth beneath; these all shall wax old as a garment, and they that dwell in the earth shall die in like manner, but Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail: from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.”

Consider we, therefore, what a long and a great restraint must purposely be called into exercise of this mighty power of God, that he does not at once destroy, and bring to everlasting confusion, the soul that rebels against him. It was shown in this case of the apostle when the Saviour at his appearing struck him down to the ground by his glory, but nevertheless did not destroy him, as he justly might have done in his provoked displeasure. It is shown too in acts of judgment, by the fact that there have been occasions in which he has suffered his wrath to smoke against his enemies and his whole displeasure to arise. Look at the deluge! The time of mercy and forbearance came to its end. The decree was passed. “The windows of heaven were opened,” and the waters came. Surely and steadily they rose till the tops of the hills were covered, and all that was on the earth died in one common doom. Look at the burning of Sodom! They were “sinners exceeding before the Lord.” The ordeal of trial was only ten righteous persons, and the city should be saved. But there were only four.

"The Lord rained down upon Sodom fire and brimstone from the Lord." Look at the end of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram! The notice of warning was given to "get up from those wicked men." Then "the earth opened her mouth, and they went down quick into hell." Look at the end of Babylon! Not all its walls, nor the two-leaved gates of brass, could save it from destruction. Or look at the greatest of all the judgments of Jehovah which will ever have been till the judgment-day,* because it came upon those who had professed to be his people,—the destruction of Jerusalem!

And are there not marks even now, in nations and in individuals, that "God is not mocked,—that sin does not go unpunished, though hand be joined in hand?" Who does not find such a fact in many a case that has happened in his own individual knowledge? Who does not see it exemplified in the dreadful career of that pestilence which has now for fourteen years been sweeping across the globe, which has carried off so many millions by all that is terrible in dying, by a frightful, malignant, and inevitable end?† Yes, God has only to speak, and all the elements the world is composed of turn at his bidding into means of destruction,—the water to deluge, the earth to open its mouth, the flame to come down and devour, or the air, by which men live, to be poisoned with noisome pestilence that men may die.

Where is the hardened sinner, then, that, if he seriously thought what a God he has to do with, would dare, like Saul of Tarsus, to be living in rebellion against him, and perversely persisting to defy him? Yet such there are. And are not such, brethren, some of ye? If it be not rebellion by open resistance it is rebellion by persisted impenitence. You

* Matt. xxiv. 21. † Cholera Morbus.

strive with your Maker by determined carnal indulgence, by unbelief and hardness of heart. And who does not see that God is forbearing with you, if perchance you will come to repentance?

3. But then, as the *third great doctrinal principle*, there is likewise on the part of the Lord towards sinners *a large exertion of Divine, Almighty power to convert and save them*. O how true, how evidently true is the frequent statement of Scripture, that a man cannot turn, or change, or amend himself! that his new birth must be “of the Spirit!”* that as great an act of power, as when God commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must pass on his soul, by the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining into his heart in the face of the Lord Jesus!† that as much as it was of God at the first to create the world, so much it is of God to make a new creature in Christ Jesus! that as it was the needful operation of the Spirit to move on the face of the waters of primary chaos, so that order and shape might be given to the earth without form and void, so must the Spirit of Jehovah move upon the sinful, unregenerate soul, yea, brood and hover over it, as that word fairly signifies,‡ that he may by his gracious operation, awake it to order, and spiritual grace and beauty, to being, and light and life!

Saul was a daring sinner against Jehovah. He was, however, given to Christ by the Father, “separated to him from the womb.”§ How shall he answer the end for which God designed him? In the very act of his rebellion, just when it was at its height, an act of Almighty power was instituted and achieved for him. The Saviour himself comes down from hea-

* John iii. 5. † 2 Cor. iv. 6.

‡ מִרְחָפֶת Gen. i. 2. ¶ Gal. i. 15.

ven,—stops the persecuter in the way,—strikes him down to the earth,—displays his glory before him,—speaks the word of revelation “I am Jesus,” the Saviour given to the world, and turns him from a furious opposer to a friend and a preacher of his Gospel. “It pleased God to reveal his Son in him.”

O how manifold are the ways and the wisdom of God ! how gracious are the workings of his power to bring ungodly souls to him ! Nebuchadnezzar, to turn his heart, is sent from his kingly throne to live with the beasts of the forest. Manasseh, to subdue his impiety and wickedness, is made a captive in a foreign kingdom ! David, to break his heart for his backsliding, is driven from his dynasty and his son set in arms against him ; he is sent to walk through the desert, barefoot, ashes upon his head, and the bitter enemy of himself and of his God to curse and blaspheme him as he walked along it. And Saul of Tarsus is turned into Paul the apostle by a door being opened in heaven and himself being struck to the earth before the Saviour’s manifested glory ! Who shall despair of salvation, if only he will come and lay hold of the power of God to effect it ? Who shall be utterly dismayed at the strength and number of corruptions, if God, if his Lord and Saviour is so mighty in means and so “ rich in glory ”* to destroy and bring down those corruptions, to renew and sanctify his nature ?

Brethren, the power is of God. Christ has had given him by the Father “ power over all flesh, that he may give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him.”† Go to him and you are safe for ever. However much you are unwilling, ask of him, and he will make you willing. However you do not understand it, ask of Christ, and he will teach you to

* Eph. iii. 16. † John xvii. 2.

know his voice, and to follow him. He will enlighten,—he will sanctify,—he will convert the will. He will subdue your iniquity. He will satisfy your conscience. “Knock and it shall be opened. Ask and it shall be given you.”

II. It remains now that we notice the *abuses which may be made* of the doctrine that has been preached to you;—the risk which there is in the matter of this sudden, immediate conversion, *of delusive enthusiasm, and false conceptions respecting it.*

1. There is, *first*, the delusion of *supposed inability*. Many there are that say, ‘conversion, it seems, is a thing which none but the Lord can do. We cannot achieve it ourselves. We have not the power for this, and therefore in vain we seek it; we cannot obtain it if we do. Let us therefore wait. If the Lord do not make us willing, willing we shall not be. And this must be done “in the day of his power.”* If “without Christ we can do nothing,” then let us be content till Christ, as he came to the apostle, is pleased to come to us. St. Paul was not seeking him, when the Saviour came; why then is it needful that we should seek him?’

My friends,—if this is your view and your purpose respecting the Saviour, then, as long as it is so, you never will know him. Many, very many are always dropping into hell because they have taken these views and held these sentiments. In all these views and opinions, the danger lies in the wilfulness of the decision. St. Paul was not seeking, we grant you. The Lord, we admit, was found, as he often is, by one that sought him not. But then St. Paul had not made up his mind, as you have, that he would not seek what he knew he ought to attain to. This is the

* Psa. cx. 3.

plan of the Saviour with by far the most of his people,—Ask of the Father to give his Holy Spirit, and “he will guide you into all the truth.” You have not because you ask not. There is no other reason that you do not find, but because you do not seek.

2. There are some that will go a step further than this in error. The abuse which they make of this doctrine of sudden unlooked for conversion is a strong, unscriptural delusion of *unlimited predestination*. The objection is raised by the sinner that loves his sins, ‘God has a purpose to save his own people. St. Paul was appointed from his mother’s womb to salvation. Am I one of the elect? If I cannot ascertain and be sure of this, what need I seek for that which perhaps I can never have?’

My friends, let St. Paul be his own interpreter what predestination is. We ask you this question,— Does he not always precede it by another important principle,—by the Divine foreknowledge? “whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate;” “elect according to his foreknowledge, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.”* And do you suppose that this is a refuge for you? Does it not rather much more make against you? It shows you that God foreknows, and therefore knows your character; “known unto him are all things from the beginning of the world.” His eyes, as a flame of fire, discern and his eyelids try the hearts of the children of men. Does it not therefore, instead of excusing your negligence, most surely and irrefragably testify, “if thou seek him he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him he will cast thee off for ever.”

3. Thirdly, there is the delusion of *unwarranted*

* Rom. viii. 29. 1 Pet. i. 2.

licentiousness :—‘if Saul of Tarsus was what he was and yet found mercy, then why may not we? let us continue in sin that grace may abound,—let us eat, drink, and be merry.’

Hear, then, again, brethren, what this apostle testifies; “I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly* and in unbelief.” I obtained mercy, it is true, as the chief of sinners; it is true, as a “pattern of all long-suffering” afterwards; but I obtained mercy because I was in ignorance, sincere in error, and did not know my culpability.—“Father,” said Christ, “forgive them, for they know not what they do.” “Lord,” prayed Stephen on this account for his destroyers, and his prayer for Saul was answered, “lay not this sin to their charge.”

O what a different case from those who sin against light and knowledge of the truth! Find, my hearers, in the whole of Scripture, a pardon for wilful sin, a pardon for any but sins of ignorance, darkness, and infirmity, and then we surrender the Scriptures, as not Jehovah’s testimony. But this you cannot discover. Rather, what is that declaration,—“he that sinneth against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, neither in this world, neither in that which is to come?”—rather, what is that sentence,—“if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a *certain* fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation that shall consume the adversary?”† “The servant that knew his Lord’s will and did it not shall surely be beaten with many stripes.” Yes, depend upon this,—that none is so surely getting ready for hell, and going on his way to endure it, as he that knoweth but does not do the will,—that says, “God careth not for it,—let us sin that sin may be forgiven us.”

* 1 Tim. i. 13. † Matt. xii. 32. Heb. x. 26, 27.

4. Lastly, there is in the matter of these cases of sudden conversion the delusion of *unjustified reliance*. If all that pretend to be converted were really and truly changed, the world around us, to say the least of it, would be as full of saints as it is of sinners. But not so;—there is a false, ungrounded reliance with many, alas! very many, upon mere natural feelings, perhaps of strong excitement, which were once upon a time called forth in them at some former point of their private history, or which at particular seasons of occasional impression are it may be repeated. They go to the preached word, if such it can be called where many of these frequent, and to use their own expression, they ‘get their soul set at liberty,—their sins forgiven them.’ Then forsooth they are changed, converted persons. But what is the true statement? They have mistaken impression for conversion; and their heart is still unsanctified, and they have a form without the power of godliness.

Hear, therefore, ye that are in such a condition, the further testimony of this divine apostle: “When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me, I conferred no more with flesh and blood.” This is the fruit of conversion which Paul declared to be needful—a state of holiness to the Lord: and therefore he says to all men, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”*

* Gal. i. 16. —vi. 7, 8.

SERMON XXII.

DIST. III. OPERATIVE. SEC. I. EXAM. I.

SIMON PETER.*

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, —but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not : and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.—Luke xxii. 31, 32.

IT has been laid down as the principle of this course of enquiry into the cases of evangelical conversion recorded in the New Testament, that they bring that work of Divine grace in the heart before us under different *distinctions* in different individuals. These distinctions, it has more than once been remarked, it is needful to consider and take into account, in order that we may rightly examine and prove the point of our own personal experience of such a work,—and that we may calculate the degree in which we have advanced in it,—

* The early history of this disciple will be found again adverted to in the course of the work, in order to particularize his first religious impressions, and advances towards conversion, when the Lord Jesus began first to work in him by his grace and in his fellow-disciples of the Baptist.

and that we may estimate rightly the difficulties, constitutional, circumstantial, or characteristic that lie in our way, so as to make us more watchful against them, and more frequent in prayer to our Lord for grace to help us,—and that we may be able to detect any measure of self-deception in mistaking natural or educational feelings for a spiritual work, as well as to discover the remaining depths of deceitfulness and carnality which have still to be broken up,—and yet nevertheless, lest at such a view of our real condition of character we should be swallowed up of over much sorrow, that we may be enabled very plainly and clearly to discover the marks of a gracious change in us, the proofs and tests of a spiritual nature, and to rejoice in the evidence they lawfully give us that we have passed from death unto life, and are therefore passing from sin to holiness, and from the world to heaven.

Two of these distinctions of difference in the work of conversion in different characters have been already considered. *First* there has been considered *a moral* distinction, in the work,—that is, the difference which arises from the previous moral character:—it has been shown in the conversion of Nathanael, already, to begin with, “an Israelite indeed and in whom there was no guile,” contrasted with the act of the same converting grace, as it passed upon the dying thief that was crucified near the Saviour, and the woman who had been “a sinner,” but who came and washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

There has, *secondly*, been considered what has been called, for the sake of arrangement, *a temporal* distinction in the work,—a distinction of *time*: that is, the difference which arises from the *period* of time at which the sinner is awakened, whether in early life,

or declining years,—and from the *lapse* of time, whether the soul is converted by gradual, and often educational means, or suddenly awakened in the midst of a careless and guilty life ;—and again from the *duration* of time, whether its deliverance from sin is an act, as it often is, of special and speedy preparation for its soon removal to eternity, or whether its lot is appointed for a long probationary passage through the briars and thorns of the wilderness, the temptations, and difficult duties, and trials of faith, and exercises and afflictions of the present evil existence. We have seen the example of gradual conversion, and conversion in early life, of progressive educational conversion in the instance of Timothy, observing the particular difficulties pendant upon it, and the consequent cautionary duties resulting out of it. We have seen, as the contrary example, and liable to opposite errors, the instance of sudden and instantaneous conversion in Saul of Tarsus, breathing out threatenings against the Saviour's people, but changed, as it were in a moment, to become his believing disciple and his appointed minister. I have now, *thirdly*, to present to you another distinction of difference in this great and important work. I shall call it, by way of a name,

III. An *operative distinction* in Conversion.

It is the difference which there is, often a very great and important one, in different persons who are brought under the influence of renewing grace, in consequence of the difference of *natural disposition*, which renewing grace has to work upon, and over which its influence has to be exerted. The difference in disposition, and temper, and bias of mind is often great to an extreme. Some are naturally sceptical, unbelieving ; some are remarkable for pride and unbendingness of nature ; some are particularly volatile, and light,

and inconsiderate; some are inactive and indolent, and difficult to move on any important subject, not the claims of religion only. Others, on the contrary, are naturally thoughtful, and easily believing, and meek of persuasion, and free from strong passions, and tempers, and lusts, and sins, and diligent and fervent in spirit, even before the grace that bringeth salvation begins its work upon them.

Now this, I say, produces an operative difference in the process of their conversion;—a difference in the *operation* of the Spirit's work within them. It is a difference arising from the difficulty or else from the facility with which that operation is carried on, according to the character, the disposition it deals with and its besetting sins. For although we know that our Lord is able, if he pleased, in any one of his disciples to overcome all besetments at once, so that every mountain of impediment should be thrown down in a moment and before the heavenly Zerubbabel should become a plain, and so that grace should be triumphant and complete the character at once, like the gourd of Jonah springing up to perfection in one night,—yet this is not the way that it pleases him to deal with his people;—it is not the economy of grace. The work of his Spirit is like the witness of his word. As the word is “line upon line and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little,” so the work of the Spirit is “faith to faith,” “grace for grace,” “strength to strength,” and “glory on to glory.”*

We have to consider, therefore, as the *third* distinction to be made,—as an *operative* distinction to be made in the work of evangelical conversion, the difficulty or else, on the contrary, the furtherance of the work which arises from the different dispositions and tempers, the

* Rom. i. 17. John i. 16. Psa. lxxxiv. 7. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

carnal besetments, or mental powers of the different unconverted. It is evident the subject might be opened up to an almost unlimited extent, that is, an extent as great as the various failings of mankind. I shall only advert, therefore, in two or three sermons, to some of the principal of them.

Let us, for the present opportunity, consider one very strong, and for a long time stubborn impediment, which we find so strongly marked in the natural disposition of one of the twelve, Simon Peter, who became at the last such an eminent saint and apostle, but was once, for the earlier part of his progress, so beset and hindered that he had nearly made shipwreck of faith, and was addressed by his heavenly Master by the very title of Satan, and again was assured by him, in the words of our text, “Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.”

It is manifest no doubt to all of you what that particular disposition was in him which made his conversion so long and difficult,—and which well nigh lost his soul. It was *self-reliance*;—an over confident spirit, perhaps accompanied by a certain description of pride and forwardness, which made him forget, or at least not habitually remember, that absolute rule of the Gospel “without me ye can do nothing.” There are many, as I shall afterwards show, who are in this state of mind, who have much of this same disposition, though perhaps they are not aware of it. To them this subject directs itself.

I. I shall *first*, therefore, only in the way of narrative, *recal* very briefly *some of the facts of this disciple's history*;

II. And then, *secondly*, *draw from them some experimental remarks*.

I. This remarkable disciple is first introduced to our notice as having been found by his brother Andrew and brought to Christ. He had probably, as we know that Andrew had, up to that time been a disciple of John the Baptist. They had heard the Baptist proclaim the Messiah's coming, as the messenger sent before him. The Baptist looking upon Jesus said to Andrew, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." Andrew turned and "followed" Christ, "came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day." Then he "findeth his brother Simon and saith to him, We have found the Messiah; and he brought him to Jesus." Our Lord even then, at the very beginning of his discipleship, in the view of his future eminence for the building of his Church, gave him, in addition to his own name of Simon, the surname of Cephas or Peter, a rock or stone.*

After this he appears to have returned to his own employment for a time, as a fisherman on the lake of Gennesareth. There the Lord afterwards came and called him, having previously raised his wife's mother from a fever. After preaching the word of the Gospel in Peter's vessel he caused them to let down their nets for a draught, and a miraculous multitude was taken. By this he symbolically taught them what should be the work of the preached word, the gathering of fish by them as fishers of men into the Gospel net. Peter fell down at the knees of Jesus and said to him "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But the Lord had a purpose of grace concerning him, and a work of grace for him to do, and instead of departing away from Peter he called Peter to leave his worldly occupation and come from that moment and be with him.†

* John i. 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42. † Luke v. 1—11.

In all the subsequent history of the twelve with their Divine Master, while he was with them, Peter appears to have held the principal station. If any thing more secret of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven was to be witnessed by some of them, Peter was one. When the heaven was opened and the Saviour was glorified at his transfiguration, the three that went unto the mountain were Peter and James and John. When he raised the daughter of Jairus, he suffered no man to follow him but Peter and James and John. When he went to his agony in Gethsemane, he took no man with him but Peter and James and John. Or if any question were asked by Christ of his disciples, it was almost always asked of Peter, or else replied to by Peter: "Whom say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Thou art Peter,—a rock,—and upon this rock I will build my church."* And not to mention other occasions, when the question was put to the disciples "Will ye also go away?" Peter replied to it, "Lord, to whom should we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

Notwithstanding this eminence of Peter, he was, however, as we all well know, conspicuous for his infirmity. Zeal, it is true, he had for the Lord and Saviour, which led him to a bold and a forward testimony, but that same zeal was the avenue for the enemy to try and assault him, and brought down upon himself the most painful epithets of censure and warnings of reproof from the Omniscient mind of his Divine

* This is the only honest rendering of this passage. Other methods are ingenious but neither candid nor philosophical. There is nothing gained against Romanism by such interpretations. They are Uzzah touching the ark,—man's lie to prop God's truth.

Redeemer to whom he meant at the time to minister : “ O thou of little faith ! Get thee behind me Satan, thou art an offence to me. Couldst thou not watch with me one hour ? Satan hath desired to have thee, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.” “ If it be thou, said Peter,” “ bid me come to thee on the water.” Here, forsooth, was confidence. But what was the end of it ? “ O thou of little faith wherefore didst thou doubt ? ” “ This, Lord,” said Peter,—to “ suffer many things and be killed,—this be far from thee ! ” Here was affection. But what was the answer ? “ Get thee behind me Satan, thou art an offence—thou savourest not the things that be of God but the things that be of men.” “ Lord, I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death.” Here was devotedness. But read the next verse to it ;—“ I tell thee Peter, before the cock crow this very day, thou shalt deny me thrice.” “ Lord shall I smite with the sword ? ” Here was attached fidelity ; and the blow was struck : but it made that disciple for ever a fulfilment of the prophecy, that his heavenly Master should be “ numbered with transgressors.”

And then further than this ;—although notwithstanding the pre-eminent apostleship of Peter he was thus conspicuous for infirmity, yet notwithstanding that infirmity, he was, in a very marked degree, the object of the Saviour’s solicitude and careful affection : “ I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not :”—here was encouragement afforded him. “ Upon this rock I will build my church :” here was dignity conferred upon him. “ The Lord turned and looked upon Peter :”—here was generous upbraiding to turn his heart. “ Tell his disciples and Peter that he is risen from the dead :”—here was a special concern for him lest his faith should fail him. “ Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me ? ” the thrice repeated question was to lead him to close examination, that he might be fitted

for the charge that was given him, “Feed my sheep.” And to him the manner of the death he should die was expressly appointed and predicted, to stir him up to diligent activity while he was in the earthly tabernacle, and to place the honourable crown before him of dying as a martyr to his Master’s cause.*

II. I have given you so far nothing but narrative history ;—let us hasten, therefore, now to deduce from it *some experimental remarks.*

1. We should make it useful in the *first* place, by observing the workings of *nature against grace* in him—the outward developments of an inward disposition—as a *mirror of truth for self-detection*. The reader or hearer of the word is rightly compared to “a man beholding his natural face in a glass.”† Let us thus behold, in the account which is given of this disciple, the fault so manifestly shown in his natural disposition, in the course of his earlier walk as a believer, and the difficulty which it caused him, and the risk which it cost him before he attained to perfection. And let us do this in self-application, to detect in ourselves the same prevailing tendency, if it be peradventure our besetment also.

I am not now speaking of those amongst us who are not disciples at all nor really seeking the way to Zion. Their self-confidence is a different thing ;—it is all iniquity. Their best resolves are vanity. Their formal observances and rigid duties which they trust in are abomination with God. The character before us is that of a Christian believer, a true but a tried disciple. Are there not some among you, beloved, who can see in the case of Peter an experience suited to your own? You also find that the life of faith is a slow, and a difficult, and, alas! too frequently, an un-

* John xxi. 18, 19.

† James i. 23.

suceessful and gainless undertaking. It has hitherto had in your past experience its frequent stumblings, its interruptions, its frail resolutions, and its broken vows; and, therefore, its frequent rebukes, and frowns, and chastisements. See if that difficulty,—see if that want of success, then, arises not from the same or a similar cause, viz. a feeling of self-reliance,—an independent or self-dependent spirit. However you may think it is otherwise, and that you feel your weakness, and mourn your sinfulness, and are looking only to Christ for strength, yet there is some delusion:—you are not habitually doing this, but are trusting too much in yourself, in the arm of flesh, and in your own devotional exercises, and in your own resolutions. You are not yet brought, as Peter was not then brought, to the true disciple spirit, the conscious helplessness and the meek simplicity of a babe in Christ Jesus. You may indeed formally confess your feebleness at times of prayer, and perhaps in some measure feel it, but you do not habitually live in the deeply-rooted conviction that “without Christ you can do nothing,”—that in him all your springs lie,—that without the continual help of his Holy Spirit, you are not so much as able to think a good thought. And therefore you make resolutions and break them; and therefore you meditate upon the words of Scripture and forget them; and you listen to sermons, and go your way; and you pray but you have not, because you ask amiss, because you do not perceive your necessity. The true disposition of a disciple is to be always “looking unto Jesus.” It is to be looking to him for every supply of strength and saucification. It is to come and be fed by him, and to walk and go in his strength. It is to open the hand wide, that he may fill it. It is to be careful for nothing, but to abide in him as a branch in the vine, so as to be always every moment receiving the strength, and the life, and the nourishment which is in him. It

is to be searching out all his promises, "great and precious promises," and pleading them ever before him. It is to bring nothing of our own in our hand that we may receive the more from him. We must let the whole of our life be not so much a doing as a receiving, but rather a constant presenting our hearts before him as the wax to the seal of his image,—as the "fleshly tablet" for him to write his law upon,—as the clay in the hands of the potter for him to form it to a "vessel fit for the Master's use."

2. It will be needful, however, in the *second* place, to notice in this disciple, an *opposite natural virtue*, or rather, shall I say, a peculiar grace which there was in him, and to use it as *a balance of character for lawful, scriptural encouragement*. The sort of self-confidence which there was in his natural disposition, and of which we speak in others, although it was a great defect, and a great hindrance to Divine grace, yet it arose from another peculiar feature in his character, which served as a balance against it, which is a great natural virtue, and gives promise of better things, and which, if brought under religious influence, is an eminent Christian grace,—I mean his *sincerity*. There was a beautiful openness and frankness of character about him. And although it led him into acts of forwardness, and needless protestations, and misguided zeal, and made him reveal his faults a great deal more than others, yet it was, no doubt, in the sight of God a thing of great price.

This sincerity of Peter,—this honest zeal in his Master's service is, we say, a precious ornament to a Christian believer, especially in days like the present of false profession, and careful concealment, and boast of judgment, and pride of character. It more than counterbalances the errors which it occasions. It were better to be sincere in our love to the Saviour,

and through a little over-zeal for his cause, a little over-much righteousness if there be such a thing, to stumble every day, than to be ever so punctiliously correct in the niceties of personal conduct for the sake of a human consistency, but never very zealously affected by the generous motive of Christ's constraining love. Brethren, if through Divine grace you are sincere,—sincere in seeking,—sincere in purpose to belong to Christ,—sincere in the profession of the little measure of hope which you already have in him,—if you will not upon any consideration talk what you do not feel let who will despise your small attainments, nor withhold what you do feel of the love of the truth within you let who will be offended,—then you are not far from the kingdom of God. Whatever you yet need to humble and prove you and lead you on, as this disciple needed and obtained, so “our God shall reveal all this unto you.” Be not discouraged at your poor enjoyments or your powerful interruptions and obstructions. You may perhaps be able to say at the present, and to say in sincerity, ‘I have tried but I have not succeeded,—I have made my endeavours—I have prayed, I have heard, I have read, but I have not found what I seek for:’—but then one thing more must be able to be added,—‘I have waited and persevered;’—and then yet a little while, and the darkness will pass and the true light shine upon you. The Holy Spirit will come to you, as he came to Peter at the Pentecost, and your heart will be established, as the heart of a true believer. Where there is not sincerity, whatever apparent effects there may be of the word for a season, they will be as the fruitfulness choked by the thorns, or the joy of the stony places, or the seed caught away by the Devil; but this is the honest and good heart which, though it be longer in growing it, eventually bringeth forth fruit a hundred-fold. There is this difference between believers and unconverted: there is

in believers this balance of character, their very faults arising from their graces, and therefore countervailed by the graces from which they originate. Their doubtings arise from their faith,—their fears from their deep convictions,—their sometimes pride and exultation, from the abundance of revelation, and the joy which it gives them in the Lord. And thus in this eminent disciple, his sinful over-confidence came from the uprightness of his spirit and the sincerity of his devotedness. It cannot be too much remembered that sin in a Christian disciple is a very different thing both in kind and character from sin in an unbeliever. And there is an Omniscient Judge who can distinguish between them. David with all his faults, great and crying as they were, was yet a “man after God’s own heart.”

3. We must, however, in the third place, look a little more strictly at the *falls and mistakes* of this disciple, and comparing them with his eminent gifts and graces we must consider them as a *monument of frailty for the use of humiliation*. It appears from this instance of Simon Peter, that there may be such a sinful alloy of self-dependence in the religious character as shall hinder a soul from prospering, even where there is every mark of a true believer in the first repentance, and creed, and life, and character. Peter entered in rightly by self-knowledge to the Christian Church;—“I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Peter believed rightly on the Lord Jesus Christ;—his confession of faith is given us, revealed to him “not by flesh and blood but by the Father in heaven,—Thou the Son of man art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter professedly depended upon the Divine assistance;—“Lord, to whom else should we go, thou hast the words of eternal life.” And the heart and affections of Peter were truly and honestly given to Christ;—“Lord, thou knowest all things, thou know-

est that I love thee." Nevertheless, for some years of his discipleship, even till the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost had thoroughly sealed him, he was not a successful and a prosperous believer.

Let this therefore be to us for *personal humiliation*. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Some, perhaps, are ready to say,—'I cannot on the whole consider this evil of self-sufficiency to be my besetment. I have felt such deep convictions of my native sinfulness,—I have so deeply lamented the hardness of my heart,—I have been so humbled and abased by it,—I have so distrusted myself as insufficient for any thing in myself.' But learn from this case of Peter, that the evil we speak of may undoubtedly consist with even these very convictions. So that perhaps you have yet very much to do before you attain to the true disposition of Christ's believer,—a thoroughly meekened, subdued, and chastened spirit, to be able to say with the Psalmist, "My soul is even as a weaned child."

4. Still, nevertheless, for our support and contentment under all this difficulty of our way, we may consider this character *fourthly*, as affording us, in the *conflict* which is presented to us in it, a *practical criterion of special grace and favour*. I speak now to those of our number who are finding their way to the kingdom to be tried with similar trials, with similar besetments, or else with others but equally great and strong ones, in an equally difficult experience. Various are the obstacles of natural character to the soul's attaining to a state of victory and cleaving to the Lord fully. Perhaps they are, with you that we are speaking to, your violent passions, your tempers, your lightness of mind, your inactivity, your love of this present world, your lusts, your pride, or your unbelief.

Now then, those that are greatly and eminently tried with besetments, so that religion with them is one constant course of laborious striving against iniquity, remember this,—that eminent trials are a mark of peculiar favour and lead to eminent and peculiar graces. Remember this,—that the most tried and proved are the most advanced and beloved believers. Peter was the chief of the apostles,—the rock upon which the Church of Christ was builded,—the first beginner of the preached word, to the Jews at Pentecost, to the Gentiles at Cæsarea. Yet Peter was tempted, tried, afflicted, and almost confounded. Satan desires to have such precious souls, that he may sift the wheat out of them and leave the chaff. There may be others that he leaves alone because they are safe in his wiles; and there may be some feeble babes in Christ whom the Saviour carries in his bosom, so that that wicked one cannot touch them. But take what eminent saint you will,—Abraham, Jacob, David, Job, or Peter,—and you shall find them greatly tried and tempted. It is the mark of their Father's love to them, the work of his gracious discipline, to purge away all their dross, and take away all their tin, that when he has tried them, they may come forth as gold. Depend upon this as a certain rule,—the more beloved of God, the more trial,—and the more trial the more grace.

5. For fifthly: we must look at the *course* of Peter's dispensation, and the *effects* which it wrought in him, and use it as a *specimen of the value of a long religious experience*. Persons may be ready to say, ‘Why may I not be permitted to go to heaven at once? If the Lord has forgiven me, and turned my heart, then the sooner I die the better, that I may leave this sinful world, and go to that blessed dwelling-place, where that which is perfect is, and that which is partial is done away.’ But this is the secret:—“let patience have her perfect work:” trial is

"working patience, and patience experience, and experience hope,"* It was so with the ancient Israelites. They might in a very few days have crossed the wilderness and entered the promised land. But he "led them about, to prove them, to show them what was in their heart, to do them good in their latter end." At one time they were in want,—at one time dying with thirst,—at another the water they had was bitter,—at another it broke from the rock and flowed around them. At one time they rested, then after they journeyed on. At one time they journeyed in peace, at another they had to pass through an hostile country. It is sufficient for the Christian to know that the Lord is appointing all this, and that all these things shall work together for good to him.

Are you, then, brethren, bearing the yoke upon you? Is the hand of the Lord upon your experience in life, upon the way that you take, upon your circumstances and concerns? And are you inwardly tried with spiritual care and trial? Then seek not to put it away. Be not hasty to remove it. Rather "be still and know that he is God." Rather wait upon him, and he is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain to you. See what this same disciple Peter could say of his trials in after-seasons:—"The trial of our faith, is far more precious than of gold that perisheth, and shall be found to honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus."† And observe the lessons of wise experience which he learned by it, in the caution he gave to others. Remembering concerning himself that Satan had desired to have him but Christ had prayed for him that his faith should not fail, he says in his general epistle, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your enemy the Devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, therefore, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions

* James i. 4. Rom. v. 4. † 1 Pet. i. 7.

are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”*

6. And then *sixthly* and *lastly*, we must look at the *help which was given* to this disciple, and the care of the Saviour over him, and use it as a *warrant*, under similar circumstances, of *Divine and gracious assistance*. The Saviour prayed for him. If the Devil was against him the Saviour was on his side. If Satan desired to sift him, the Lord desired to save him, and prayed for him that his faith should never fail him. The Lord was anxious for him, and when he denied him turned and looked upon him, and after he was risen anxiously enquired of him, “*Lovest thou me?*” and then he gave him his solemn charge to “*follow*” him, and gave him the encouraging assurance that at last he should die as a martyr to his religion. Well might St. Peter then say in his epistle to believers that they in their manifold heaviness and trials of faith, when need there is of it, have cause very “*greatly to rejoice*,” because they are “*kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.*”†

Brethren, then, what does this say to us? “Greater is he that is for us than he that is against us.” On the right-hand of the throne of glory there is an Ever-living Intercessor. We are weak and feeble, but he is All-sufficient. He is praying for all his people that their faith and their faithfulness may never fail them. Let us look to him. Let us realize a larger experience of the value of his intercession. Let us seek to be strengthened by his resurrection, even as we are saved by his precious blood.

* I Pet. v. 8, 9.

+ Ib. i. 5, 6.

SERMON XXIII.

DIST. III. OPERATIVE. SEC. I. EXAM. II.

THOMAS DIDYMUS.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.—John xx. 24—29.

WHAT a precious and invaluable treasure is true faith! Unbelief is the poison of the great serpent which he infused at the fall into our nature. So that if as Christian disciples we go down into the secret

chambers of our own hearts, what is the one great lack which we there discover? it is want of faith. What do we find to be the true source of all the religious peace that we do experience? it is the measure of faith we have already attained to. And to what do we trace all the hindrances and spiritual sadness that chequer our way, but to our remaining unbelief and mistrustfulness? O if there is one prayer that ever rises more than another to the throne of God direct and pure from the heart of an awakened sinner, it is that prayer of the disciples, “Lord, *increase our faith.*”*

True faith must be deemed to be a most valuable benefit, if it were only from the consideration of whose gift it is: it is the “gift of God.”† But besides this, I know not that there is any one spiritual benefit spoken of in Holy Scripture, which is not traced to this Divine principle of faith. It is that by which only we can “please God;”—which “whatsoever is not of is sin;”—by which we are “justified” and pardoned;—by which we “overcome the world,” and are “sanctified” and “purified,” and have “Christ to dwell in our hearts;”—and which “works by love” to Christ, and makes “Christ precious” to us,—and thus, in fact, gives into our possession and enjoyment true and unsearchable riches.‡

But, brethren, as it is written in the Bible, that “all men have not faith,”§ that is, that some men have no faith at all, so is it likewise a painful truth, that some have very little faith; yea a portion scarcely but as the grain of mustard seed, and almost smothered and lost in a heart that is full of doubtings and incredulity. Such was the character of the disciple men-

* Luke xvii. 5. † Eph. ii. 8.

‡ Heb. xi. 6. Rom. xiv. 23.—v. 1. 1 John v. 4. Acts xxvi. 18.—xv. 9.
Eph. iii. 17. Gal. v. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 7. § 2 Thess. iii. 2.

tioned in the text, whose particular case I proceed to lay before you,—as affording us a *second example* of the strong *operative* influence of divine grace over the opposing circumstances of *natural disposition*. We have seen this exemplified upon the *self-reliance* of Peter: we have now to observe its efficacy upon the *incredulity* of Thomas. Observe then, brethren, in this affecting story the following *three particulars*;

- I. FIRST, *the great sin and unreasonableness of unbelief,*
- II. SECONDLY, *the power of Divine grace to triumph over and subdue it, and*
- III. THIRDLY, *the true nature of that faith which is then established in the believing soul.*

I. Follow me, FIRST, while I endeavour to point out to you the *great sin and unreasonableness of unbelief*. And I shall do this with this object in view,—not only to show that it is entirely men's own fault, but exactly how it comes to pass that they suffer it to get such a hold upon them, such a dominion over them.

1. The *first* great cause of unbelief which this passage sets before us, as showing its sinfulness to be upon our own heads, is *unfaithfulness to light and opportunities already given*. Observe what is said of Thomas. The holy evangelist has expressly reminded us that he was “*one of the twelve* :” that is, he was one of those very men who had companied together all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them. He had been always with Jesus. He had seen his miracles,—the blind, the maimed, and the deaf restored by the word of his power; yea, the dead raised from their grave. He is especially mentioned as being present at the raising of Lazarus.* Yet the raising of Jesus was

* John xi. 16.

the point he was now questioning. He had heard him “speak as never man spake.” He had heard him point out the fulfilment of numberless prophecies in his person and work and character. And yet now after all, when put to the test, he is an unbeliever. Brethren, has it not been exactly so with you? O, what a many evidences of the truth have, in your past lives, from time to time crossed your path! How often has conviction flashed in upon you, and subdued your prejudice for the moment, but you have not been faithful to it, and it has forsaken you! How many striking answers to prayer! How many manifestations of Christ to the soul have refreshed you, and bright and encouraging views of heaven and glory! But you have not walked in the light, and darkness again came upon you. Or shall I speak of the actual unbeliever? Even with you, my friend, God has not left himself without witness. Many a time, your conscience will tell you, he has knocked at the door of your heart, and asked for admittance, and given you the call to conversion. Many a time has he warned you by his providence,—brought you down by sickness,—shook you as it were over hell itself,—carried conviction to you by his preached word, till it has smitten you by the finger of God, and made you cry out for mercy, and burnt like fire in your bones. And still you are unrepenting, unbelieving, and unsaved. Say then if this is not sinful and unreasonable,—a heart of stone,—a stubborn and grievous resistance.

2. A second leading cause of unbelief in the heart which is here presented to us, equally voluntary and criminal, is *a careless, undisciplined mind*. I mean that for want of watchfulness,—for want of a jealous watching over their own hearts, men suffer unbelief to gain strength and form itself into a habit, and thus they get into a questioning, doubting spirit. This seems to have been much the case with Thomas.

Wherever he is mentioned in the Gospels, which is in three places, he is presented to our notice as the same naturally incredulous man. In the eleventh chapter of this Gospel and the 16th verse, we find him doubting the power of Jesus to accomplish his own purposes without being put to death, or else his power to raise Lazarus ;*—in the passage before us, doubting the resurrection of Jesus himself ;—and again in the following chapter, even after he had seen the Lord and believed in the fact of his rising, still joining the other disciples to “go a fishing,” instead of devoutly and believably waiting to receive the “promise of the Father.” Whether his Greek surname of Didymus had any reference to this we have no sufficient means to determine.

Now, brethren, beware of forming a *habit* of incredulity,—a habit of unconsentingness to God’s truth and record. It is to be feared there are many whose regular and habitual state is this sort of secret unbelieving: so that only now and then they break out

* This is one of the many portions which have suffered loss in the Commentaries, owing to the unavoidable cursoriness when one man writes an exposition on the whole of Scripture. It is to be lamented that any man should venture on that responsibility, and write away, *stans pede in uno*, especially in a day like the present, when the opinions of man are respected above the teaching of the Spirit, and when writings may spring into notice, and become a word of authority, through motives of private interests, and private concern for the author. In the treatment of the above passage we have a very notable instance of such interpretation. It sets forth the saying of Thomas as scarcely so much as an error, totally losing sight of the 11th, and 14th, and 15th verses. Let it for argument’s sake be granted that it is a matter of question whether this disciple spoke of dying with Christ or dying with Lazarus, although the latter is surely absurd, when Christ had said to them plainly “Lazarus *is dead*.” If then he spoke of dying with Jesus, surely this was incredulity, as if his Omnipotent Lord could not achieve his own purposes, and did not know his own hour and the hour of the powers of darkness. If he spoke of dying with Lazarus, where was his opinion of the promise of Jesus, “I go that I may awake him?” “I am glad” that he has departed “that ye may believe?” We admit the devotedness and zealous affection of Thomas, but clearly there was mistrustfulness.

from it, like the sun from behind a cloud, when they can get, perhaps, under some awakening sermon, or something to warm them, as they call it, and make them feel. But be assured, that those who expect to live towards God in this way are under an awful delusion. The case must be exactly reversed. Instead of living habitually cold and faithless, and now and then believing in some moment of excitement, we must be habitually believing, and at times (if it must be so through the infirmity of our nature) weak, and tried, and wavering. For we may be quite certain of this, that whatever the habit is, whether belief or unbelief, it is this that will strengthen and grow on us, till the other occasional feeling is weakened, becomes more seldom in its returns, and is at last for ever extinguished. This, then, is the second proof that unbelief is men's own work, and what they have to thank themselves for,—viz. that it arises from *a want of vigorous attention to the habits they establish.*

3. I proceed to a *third* proof. Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, “*was not with them when Jesus came.*” And where were they, and what were they doing, that it is so expressly said he “*was not with them?*” Why, they were keeping the first Lord's day after the crucifixion. They had met to worship Jesus, to hold spiritual communion with him, and to get their faith strengthened and refreshed thereby. But Thomas was not there. He did not share in the exercise, and what wonder that he did not share the blessing ! Here then is the third cause why persons are in want of faith,—still, observe, adding to their own guilt. It is *neglect of those means of grace by which faith is conveyed and cultivated.*

In every instance in which the Lord after his resurrection appeared to his followers, it was to those who were employed in *seeking* him. It was first to the

weeping Mary, who had gone forth before the dawn to his sepulchre, and was looking for him in it. It was then to the disciples travelling to Emmaus, who were talking and communing of him by the way. It was afterwards to the ten disciples while they were spending the Sabbath in holy worship. His promise to them, when on earth, had been “Wherever two or three are met together in my name there am I in the midst of them,” and now he fulfilled his word. But Thomas was not with them. And what did he not lose by this neglect! Twice at that holy meeting did Jesus himself say to them “Peace be unto you!” He removed all their doubts by showing them it was indeed himself,—and it is written that it “made them glad.” He “breathed upon them” the most blessed gift of the “Holy Ghost.” But instead of this peace, and this gladness, and this unction of the Holy One, Thomas, by his absence, procured for himself a week of distraction, of sorrow, of gloom, and of unbelief.

Now, brethren, would it not be unreasonable to throw the blame of this upon God? Was it not clearly his own fault for his own negligence? And is it not so precisely with persons now? If the means are not used how shall there be the blessing? How often might you who are walking in darkness have enjoyed the light if you had but come to it! How often, had you earnestly sought the Saviour as his true disciples do, would he have manifested himself to you and given you the Holy Ghost, and spoken “peace” to your conscience! But you would not. And now it is fulfilled to you, “What a man soweth, the same shall he also reap.” That is an affecting passage in the book of Psalms, “O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. I would have fed them also with the finest of the wheat, and

with honey out of the rock, should I have satisfied thee!?"*

4. Once more ;—the unreasonableness of unbelief is shown in this case of Thomas by his *wilful resistance of very sufficient and credible evidence*. Although he did not himself see Jesus through his own negligence, yet, observe, the other disciples would not leave him to his loss, but they sought him and said to him, “*We have seen the Lord.*” This, I say then, was sufficient and credible evidence. They were men whom he knew well for their truthfulness and godly uprightness, and some, as St. John and others, that he must have loved for their devoted piety and the love they bore to Jesus. And observe, it was not merely one, or a few of them, but “*the other disciples,*” that is, the whole ten said to him “*We have seen the Lord.*” And if you say ‘still he had not had the same ocular demonstration which they had had,’ yet although this might have cast a damp over the assurance of his faith, yet it could never justify him in a wilful resolution of incredulity, “*I will not believe.*” Observe moreover, that he demanded still further evidence than the other disciples ; they had only *seen* the wounds, but he was for “*putting his finger into the print*” of them, and “*thrusting his hand into the side*” of the Redeemer.

Now, brethren, here is the grand feature of this disciple’s unbelievingness. It was not merely an infirmity, but a wilful demand and exaction even of stronger evidence than had been needful to convince his brethren, and stronger, as it proved in the sequel, than was needful as a means for his own final satisfaction. Exactly the same evidence as that which he rejected we are placed under in the present dispensation : it is the testimony of these same apostles, who said to Thomas “*We have seen the Lord,*” affirming to the

world, as the Saviour's appointed witnesses, the truth and divine reality of his mission and of his rising. And I say that it is evidence which no one has a right in a moment of wilfulness and carnal pride to gainsay. We do not ask a blind surrender to it on the one hand,—God forbid that we should,—but we protest against a determined resistance on the other. After all, it is not so much the quantity of evidence that we need, as a faithful and thankful using of what we have. The Spirit of the Lord can use the simple word of Scripture to the working of faith in us, far more effectually than all the arguments of man's unhumbed reason. “If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

5. I hasten to the *last* point which the narrative presents us, as proving the sinfulness of unbelief, which is *its great ingratitude*. It was marked, in the case of Thomas, by a peculiar want of reverence, and regard, and honourable gratitude to that tender and compassionate Saviour whom he had professed to follow. For what, brethren, was the proof he wanted of the Lord's resurrection? It was to thrust his unsparing hand into that wounded body of Jesus which had already suffered to the death out of love to his soul. It was to add yet a far bitterer anguish to the Redeemer's sufferings than the nails, or the spear, or the thorny crown, merely to satisfy the sceptical precision of his undisciplined mind. There is something in this language which, as it were, in a most strikingly emblematical manner, describes to us the true character of infidelity. For what is all our unbelief, after all that our Divine and compassionate Lord has done for us,—what is it but wrenching open afresh the wounds that he bore for us, and tearing with our base ingratitude his very heart which has already poured out its life-blood for us at his pierced side? O what debasing

and dishonouring thoughts of Jesus our Lord do we suffer to agitate our minds ! What irreverence for his glorious person ! What cold calculating precision of the exact measure of his Divinity and the possible influences of his grace ! Beloved friends, we shall never in this way get to love and honour Jesus. We must take him simply at his word, and look direct to him to make us believe it, or we shall never believe at all. We must rest for faith and for every increase of faith upon his supernatural and Omnipotent grace, his free and promised bestowments.

Brethren, we have taken a faint view, as far as time will admit, of the awful sin of unbelief, and mistrustfulness. It is a licentious *habit* gradually formed by *abuse of past privilege*, by *negligence of appointed means* by which faith is increased, and by *wilful opposition to satisfactory evidence*; and moreover than this, it is a state of direct *ingratitude* and personal dis-honour to the Lord and Saviour. Perhaps there are some who have felt the conviction applied to them, in the course of this enquiry,—‘ This is indeed my case : O I am mourning over my evil heart of unbelief and sighing for deliverance ! In the secret of my soul, when no eye of a creature sees me, it is known to my Lord how I mourn in my prayer and am vexed, and long for these gloomy doubts to be removed from me, that I may know the full consolation of his own manifested presence.’

II. It is cause for abundant thankfulness to any, if they have really attained to such a point of conviction. May the God of all grace bring them full comfort while we proceed to notice *secondly*, the *power of Divine influence to overcome completely this leaven of unbelief*.

1. We have so far seen nothing in this doubting

disciple's conduct but what we are disposed to censure ; let me now invite your attention to one little matter in it of a more pleasing kind, and which had a most important bearing upon his subsequent recovery. We have seen that the ten disciples sought for him, and said to him, "We have seen the Lord :" we have noticed his wilful rejection of their testimony. Observe now, that although he would not believe their word, yet he was so far persuaded by it, as to discover his error in not having been with them, and to join them on the next Lord's day. We read, that "after eight days again, the disciples were within, and *Thomas with them.*" He had paid for his negligence by a week's misery, and now the day of grace to him, the time of his refreshing from the presence of the Lord was at hand.

2. And here, as the key to all this, I must recur to one thing that is said of him, which we have already noticed as adding to his guilt, but which we must now notice, as the clue to his forgiveness and restoration. I mean, that he was "*one of the twelve;*" —one of those devoted, though at times frail and mistaken followers of Jesus, who were given to Christ by God the Father, whom Christ therefore had chosen and loved, and therefore would not leave nor forsake them, but love them to the end. He had said of them, in his prayer to his heavenly Father, (at the 17th chapter and 12th verse,) "those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition,"—and even this "that the Scripture might be fulfilled, for it was to be so." So likewise, (in the 15th chapter,) he had compared himself to the vine and them to the branches. However they might need pruning or chastening, as Thomas now did, still, nevertheless, they were the branches, and must abide in him.

Now, brethren,—you in particular, who are in these straits of doubt and distrustfulness,—here is comfort for you, if you can take it. Are you, notwithstanding all your infirmity, are you in Christ? Are you, I say, sincere seekers after the Lord Jesus Christ? Judge yourselves at this moment by this one test—What is the secret wish of your heart respecting your present state? Do you cling to your doubts, and shut out the light, that you may hug your sins to your bosom,—or do you long to see them vanish? Do you thirst for the Saviour, and desire a more full manifestation of him, that you may own and worship him as your Lord and your God? Then you are his:—he has given you the desire, and he will fill it:—he has begun the work, and he will carry it on in you.

Observe then, how he dealt with his disciple Thomas. He first set the disciples upon him,—they could not indeed make him believe, but they persuaded him to come to the Saviour, and then the Saviour came to him. Exactly such is the case with his people now. We, as his ministering disciples, cannot make you believe, but we can, if he gives us power, persuade you to come to him, and then he will come and make himself known to you. We can tell you to use all the appointed means, and to offer with us your hearty prayers for divine manifestations. And the more we unite in doing this, the brighter and more glorious will be those manifestations.

3. But the Saviour came to him. We read, that when they were thus assembled, and Thomas with them, “*Jesus again came and stood in the midst, and said, peace be unto you.*” And then addressing himself specially to Thomas, he said to him, in words every one of which must have broken his heart, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and

reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing."

Judge, if you can, the feelings of this poor, tried, and convicted penitent, as he heard this sentence from his divine and gracious Master—from him whose knowledge of the state of his disciple's heart and of the words of his mouth, proclaimed him at once the Omniscient God of heaven and of earth, and yet who had made this visit of Divine condescension for his own individual recovery! Surely this was the Heavenly Shepherd seeking one strayed and wandering sheep, and bringing it back into the heavenly fold! He might justly have said, ‘What is this incredulous disciple to me? he has forsaken me by his own wilfulness and it is his own fault:—his brethren too have testified to my resurrection,—why did he not believe them? let him alone—let him go—to his own sorrow,—and leave me to enjoy my undiminished happiness and glory.’—Far otherwise, however, was the Saviour’s feeling towards him. He came purposely to seek him, as a wanderer whom he still cared for, for that he had bought him with the price of his precious sacrifice: he left him not till, by the word and power of his grace, he had brought him back into the way of salvation. See, then, in this brethren, the *faithfulness of grace*,—the jealous love of Jesus over every soul that is really his. Not one shall be suffered to perish, or be plucked from his hand: and this too in accordance with the purpose of the Father himself,—for “this,” says he, “is the will of him that sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but raise it up at the last day.” It shall never be lost,—not through infirmity of our feeble nature, nor the temptations of an evil world, nor the fraud and malice of the devil, nor yet through the corruption of death and the grave, nor the final dissolution of the universe. Still, in the midst of all, he

will lose nothing, but faithfully watch over and save his own. Think not, therefore, desponding and doubting Christian, that you are too mean and insignificant to be an object of his concernment. He who thus came in the riches of his grace to restore this falling disciple, and came for him only, will as surely succour and strengthen you: only wait upon the Lord.

III. THIRDLY and *finally*, observe what this *triumph of grace consisted in*,—the insight here given us into the *true nature of faith*. There are six particular marks of it here pointed out to us, but I must barely mention them in order, and leave you to follow them out at your own leisure. Thomas answered and said unto him, “*My Lord and My God.*” 1. He acknowledged his *human nature*, addressing him by that title of “Lord,” by which he was known upon earth as the Son of Man. 2. He confessed his Divinity, of which he had had so striking a proof in his knowing his own words and thoughts, and he worshipped him as “God.” 3. He joined them together, “*My Lord and my God,*” thus declaring his belief in his united nature and mediatorial office. He not only beheld him as the Lord and God of others, but of himself. “*My Lord and my God.*” 5. He now at last believed and thus confessed his faith in that most difficult point of Christian verity, the resurrection. 6. Lastly, the Lord, in the rebuke which he finally gave to this penitent disciple, did very particularly specify the nature of that credence of faith which we have to exercise in our dispensation, and to which he attached a peculiar blessing: “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”

SERMON XXIV.

DIST. III. OPERATIVE. SEC. I. EXAM. III.

THE TWO DISCIPLES.

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.—Luke xxiv. 25—27.

WE are considering at present that peculiar distinction in the work of converting grace upon the souls of men, which arises from the different degrees of obstruction to it, and resistance against it, in their natural dispositions. On the one hand there is difficulty, often very remarkable, in many characters, especially in those who are afterwards eminent for their piety and religious usefulness. There is in those persons a long and arduous struggle between the operation of grace and the dispositions of nature. On the other hand there is a meetness and readiness in some,—some minds of a softer and meeker mould,—to receive the truth in simplicity, to believe its testimony, to submit to its claims upon them, and to yield up their hearts and affections to the teaching and

guidance, and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. With these the operation of grace is a gentle process. The word distils like the dew. They sit like Mary at the feet of Jesus. They are the sheep that hear his voice, and he knows them, and they follow him. But in the others, there are strong besettings to contend with, raging passions, and fleshly lusts, and wicked tempers, and sinful habits, and worldly-mindedness, and proud reasonings, and unbelief, and hard and rebellious thoughts against the Lord that bought them. These things are all as chains and fetters upon them, to bind them fast in misery and iron; and the chains have yet to be broken, and the violent passions, and the sceptical thoughts, and the strong lusts, and besettings of sinful indulgence have to be overcome in them. And who is sufficient for these things? There is none but that only Saviour, whose name for this purpose was called Jesus, that he might save his people from their sins. Let none, however tempted and tried, despair of success and final victory, because his grace is sufficient.

Who shall faint while such a river
Ever flows their thirst t' assuage?
Grace which like the Lord the Giver
Never fails from age to age.

Two very common classes of this sort of opposition of the natural character to the operative power of Divine grace have been pointed out already, as well as its triumph over them. We have spoken of the sceptical mind, the unbelieving incredulity of Thomas called Didymus, who was nevertheless brought at the last to fall before the Saviour and worship him, and confess to him, "My Lord and my God." And we have noticed the over-forward confidence and self-reliance of Peter, until by a painful experience of his own infirmity, and severe trials of his faith almost to its failing, and an imminent risk of Satan having him, he was, by the prayer, and the counsel, and the grace of

his Lord and Saviour, “converted” and established in the faith, and was made the more useful minister of it that he might afterwards “strengthen his brethren,” —that he might warn them, as he does in his epistle, against their “adversary the Devil,”—that he might console them with the view which he gives them of the precious value of their “trials of faith,” and with the assurance which he gives them that nevertheless they were “kept by the power of God, through that faith unto salvation, and that he might speak those words of encouragement to every tempted believer, “The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you ! To him be glory for ever and ever : Amen.”*

I have now, for the present opportunity, to advert to two other instances,—those of the disciples mentioned in the text, which illustrate a *third* very strong and perhaps very common impediment in the natural mind against the work of religious influence in the operation of the Spirit. It is the state of *a slow and a blind understanding*,—“O fools and slow of heart,”—a dark, and a dull, and a heavy mind towards spiritual things and the truths and testimonies of Divine Revelation. It is exemplified in those two of the disciples who had the conversation with Jesus when he joined himself to them as they walked by the way, —one of them, whose name was Cleopas, or, as some think, Alpheus, the father of James, and the other whose name is not recorded, but supposed by some to be Luke himself who wrote the account of the conversation. I shall look at the narrative with *three* objects in view ;

I. *First*, as exemplifying the particular state of mind which we are going to consider, viz. *a considera-*

* 1 Pet. i. 5—7. —v. 8—11.

ble difficulty,—a dulness of understanding,—a slowness of heart, even in a true disciple of Jesus, to receive and perceive the truth of the Divine Revelation;

II. *Secondly,* as affording directions to all who have such experience, by showing us *the means which the Saviour adopted to remove and overcome that difficulty in these disciples;*

III. *And thirdly,* as affording to us gracious and special encouragement, by showing us *the power of his grace,* the strength which there is in Christ, to make those means effectual.

I. Consider we then, in the first place, the *state of mind* in which our Lord and Saviour found these disciples when he joined himself to them; exemplifying to us a particular kind of *hindrance to the clear understanding and cordial reception of religious truth,* which exists in many who are nevertheless true disciples. What that hindrance is, the different points of the narrative will perhaps make plain to us. To have a correct view of this part of our subject we must of course take notice of *two circumstances*; 1. *what was particularly in the truth which they could not understand,* and 2. *why it was that they stumbled at it,* that is, what there was in the manner of looking at it, in the state and disposition of their minds, which prevented them from perceiving it. In brief, we shall notice the truth which they stumbled at, and the reason why.

1. *First of all, what was the point of revealed truth to which they were fools, and were slow of heart to receive it?* It was just that very thing which is still to this day the turning point of difficulty, the touchstone of trial in religion,—it was the cross of Christ. It was that cross of Jesus which is “foolishness” to the learned Greek, and a “stumbling-block” to the legal, carnal Jew, but that of which all the spi-

ritual seed, every one of the children of God in this world are saying “God forbid that I should glory” in any thing else, because it is the power of God and the wisdom of God to salvation to every one that believeth. “We trusted” indeed, said these two disciples,—we had entertained a hope, but now it is come to nothing, —“we trusted it had been he that should have redeemed Israel, but the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and now they have crucified him.” “He was indeed a prophet mighty in word and deed before God and all the people ;”—this we have seen by his miracles, they were done before all the people ;—“but we thought he was to be the Redeemer :” we thought he would have raised our nation to a state of glory and greatness, delivered us from scattering and captivity, and restored us to the kingdom. At least we thought that if so be that he must have been crucified, he would have fulfilled his promise, and risen the third day : “but besides all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done.” Now we are leaving Jerusalem : we have kept the Passover, and we go our way to our own village ;—we go to Emmaus and “commune together and are sad.”

So spake, brethren, these two disconsolate disciples, Cleopas and his companion, as they walked along by the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Jesus himself, at the very time of their dulness, having really risen from the dead was talking with them ; but their eyes were holden that “they did not know him ;”—an outward emblem of their inward blindness of heart. And this which I have related was the answer which Cleopas made him to the question he asked of them when he had drawn near to them, “What communications are these which ye have together as ye walk and are sad ?” And to this it was that the Lord replied to them as reproving the state

of their mind, "O fools, and slow of heart,"—it was a strong expression for the Saviour to use to those whom he loved and cared for,—O ye fools! ye fools and slow of heart! foolish and slow "to believe what all the prophets have spoken, how Christ was to suffer these things, and by a dispensation of suffering to enter into his glory."

Do we not some of us see in this the humbling portraiture of our own disposition and character? Is it not to some of us an exemplification of the passage, that as, "face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man?" We also shrink from the dispensation of the cross, instead of cordially embracing and perceiving it, and rejoicing entirely in it, without scruple of objection, as the only method of atonement which the justice, the wisdom, and power of Jehovah could accomplish, for a lost and ruined world,—as the way of reconciliation, and the method of sanctification.

2. Let us notice, then, in the *next* place, the *reason why* these disciples stumbled as they did at this particular point of revelation, and could not enter into it. Let us see what there was in themselves or their manner of looking at it, which made them object to it, which made them foolish, that is, without understanding, and slow of heart to receive it. It is a remarkable fact, which is also the same in all that entertain to Revelation the same disposition of mind as they did, that the whole of the difficulty to these disciples in understanding the dispensation of the cross proceeded from two directly opposite causes. It proceeded both from *reason*, and, if I may make such a word, from *unreason*; that is, it was *partly* from the *use of their reason*, and *partly* from the *want of their reason*. And, as all objectors against Revelation do, they just put each of these in the proper place of the other. Where they ought to have simply believed

they reasoned, and where they ought to have used their reason they were found unreasonable and slow of heart to believe. A word upon each of these.

(1.) In the *first* place these two disciples did not receive and perceive the value of a crucified Saviour, because they *reasoned where they ought, instead, to have believed*. While they walked, it is said they communed together and *reasoned*. ‘How can these things be?’ we may imagine them saying:—‘the Son of God, that could have called for twelve legions of angels, to be imprisoned and crucified by evil and mortal men! He who was the Lord of life, to become a dying creature, and perish on the cross! He who was one with the Father, and the object of the Father’s love, to be forsaken by him, and delivered up to his enemies, and to be buried in the sepulchre! Alas! we have believed in vain;—our hopes are come to disappointment;—for what could be the object of such a dispensation as this?’ They “*reasoned together.*”

Now this, beloved, is the very way to take to close the eyes of our minds against the truth as it is in Jesus. The rule of the Bible, depend upon it, is this,—that “the natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. It is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.” I believe it will be found in eternity that it is purposely made to be so in order to humble the pride of man, to break his lofty and independent spirit, and to bring him in conscious ignorance, in a bruised, penitent, suplicating helplessness to the throne of grace, confessing “I am as a beast before thee, more brutal than any man and have not the knowledge of the Holy: O what I know not teach thou me.”* And

* Prov. xxx. 2, 3.

then, brethren, the Lord will reveal that knowledge. “ Nevertheless, though the *vail* is upon their heart, when they shall turn to the Lord the *vail* shall be taken away.”* “ God, says the apostle, “ hath revealed to us by his Spirit. We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given us of God.” “ The meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way.” And if any will so seek him, most surely and certainly he will be fond of them. He will give them knowledge instead of ignorance, a sanctified faith for a doubting incredulity, and make them wise, and quick, and understanding, instead of foolish and slow of heart.

(2.) But then, do not suppose, dear brethren, that we mean to say to you, that you are to bow to Revelation with a blind and ignorant surrender as a thing *against your reason*. I am only contending against reason out of its place,—reason put in the place of faith, instead of being used as a help and evidence to it. For observe, in the next place, that these very disciples, while they reasoned where they should have believed, in another respect remained *unbelieving* through the *want of a lawful use of their reason*. They had plenty of evidence which they had not used, nor had even tried it. There was all that the prophets had spoken respecting those very sufferings of Christ which now they could not understand;—“ Fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”—their hearts were heavy that they could not understand it, their minds were blinded that they could not see it. Then again, they appear to have known that the Lord was to rise on the third day: and yet on that very day they leave Jerusalem and go, as it probably was, to their own home. “ This is the third day,” said they, “ since these things

* 2 Cor. iii. 15, 16.

were done." And in addition to this it appears that before they had left the city, certain women, Mary Magdalene, and Johanna, and Mary the wife of this very Cleopas himself had come from the sepulchre, and told the disciples how that the body was risen, and that angels had appeared to them and told them that Jesus was alive ; and that some of the disciples, namely—Peter and John, had gone to the sepulchre and had found it so ;—but still, because that they had not actually seen him, "their words seemed to them as idle tales," and believing only that some had taken his body, and they knew not where they had laid him, they left Jerusalem and went their way.*

My dear brethren, mark the right use of reason in religion : it is in a humble spirit to receive a faithful testimony. *We* have the words of the prophets,—all that they have spoken concerning Christ, how that he should suffer and enter into his glory. It is "a light shining in a dark place, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, till the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your heart."† *We* have also the testimony of these first apostles that Christ is risen. They form together a testimony for the truth. Have we considered with proper reverence what that testimony is? It is the word of Almighty God. It stands on his oath of assurance, as the word of a God that cannot lie ;—the heavens shall pass away but it shall not pass away. It is a "word of faith;"‡—it tells of a suffering, dying, bleeding, but it tells us also of a risen and glorious Christ, now ever living on the throne to make intercession for us. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself. He that believeth not hath made God himself a liar. He that believes it shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned." Reason is to use it, and to think of it, and to contemplate upon it, and to understand it. But

* Ver. 10—12, 22—24. John xx. 1—4. † 2 Pet. i. 19. ‡ Rom. x. 8.

in order to this, reason is also to submit to it. And let any one do this in a simple, child-like, teachable, humble spirit, and the Lord, who did open the eyes of these disciples to know him, and opened their understandings to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures to their understanding, shall reveal it to all that so seek him, and make them joyful in his house of prayer.

II. I observe therefore, *secondly*, that the narrative before us—the account of these two disciples—affords *some useful directions* to all who experience their difficulty, their slowness of heart to receive and perceive the truth. It shows to all such the means which the Lord adopted with those disciples to overcome that difficulty. The course which he adopted was the *use of the written word*. “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

There is much encouragement and gracious guidance in this to tried and tempted but sincerely seeking disciples. Dear brethren, if you want to know what you are to do to get your understanding enlightened, and your slowness of heart and your sinful prejudices taken out of the way, then here is the directory. Go to the written word. Go to the word of prophecy, and diligently read it and carefully meditate all that it says of Jesus. “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”* The Lord was desirous to convince and comfort these two disciples, and this was the plan be adopted. He did not at once, as he might have done, manifest forth his glory by letting them know that it was himself really risen, but concealing himself from them, as if he were merely a teacher, he led them in preference to the written word. He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things that concerned himself. Ye that are need-

* Rev. xix. 10.

ing, therefore, a light to shine into your minds to remove the blindness of the natural understanding, see your remedy. The Lord and Saviour desired to comfort and enlighten the minds of these his servants. His eye that never slumbers nor sleeps was upon them as they walked. He came and appeared to them on purpose to do this for them, and the means which he used was the common use of the written word.

If you are, then, as they were in all respects, believe that he cares for you likewise. Believe that he wishes your prejudice to be cancelled, your darkness to be enlightened. And although it is not your privilege to have such a sermon preached to you, preached by Christ himself, as that to Cleopas and his companion, when all that is in the Scripture concerning Christ was opened and told by Christ's own mouth, yet the same Scripture you have to go to, and the promise of the Spirit as a Spirit of truth to reveal it, and to guide you by it into all truth. Let us ever remember that this—the Word itself—is the best and the highest witness to its own veracity. It is higher than miraculous evidence, for “if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”* The types of the law, the ancient sacrifices, the visions of the prophets, and the promises of God to his Church in every age—all of them point to the Saviour, and all of them meet in Jesus. And if any will humbly take that holy volume, and read, and mark, and learn, and inwardly digest it, with deep humility, with reverence and godly fear, looking up to the Heavenly Teacher in simple faith and beseeching him, “Open thou mine eyes that I may see wondrous things from thy law,”—he will surely be made wise unto salvation,—he will certainly know the truth, and the truth will make him free. But then, observe, I say if any one does this in this

* Luke xvi. 31.

spirit, in this disposition of mind ; if any feel in this matter as these disciples did. For you will observe in them, brethren, a very notable difference, even in this very same difficulty they had to contend with, from the spirit and temper of a wilful and a willing unbeliever. Observe three marks of it.

1. They, it is said, were "*sad*." The man that *wilfully* shuts his eyes to the truth and makes resistance against religion, is far from being sorrowful that he does not receive it. Rather he rejoices to think that it is not true. He wishes it not to be true, and so persuades himself into that unbelieving. But these disciples were sad and sorrowful, were grieved at the heart for their disappointed reliance. The wilful opposer says, as the state of his mind, 'Give me death to be eternal sleep, that I may never appear in the judgment to bear the wrath of God and of the Lamb.' The doubting Christian, on the contrary,—the tempted child of God, in the midst of all his seasons of darkness, says, as the language of his desires, "Never shall I be satisfied but when I awake with thy likeness, and behold thy face in righteousness."

2. Then again, we must note that *Christ* and the things concerning Christ were the *subject matter of their conversation*. They communed and talked of them as they walked by the way together. The wish of the ungodly is to banish these things from their thoughts much more from their conversation. They are never so happy as when they do not think about God. But "those that fear the Lord speak often one to another, and they think upon his name. They shall be mine saith the Lord in the day when I make up my jewels."^{*}

3. And then besides this, observe of them that they

* Mal. iii. 16, 17.

were eager and wishful to hear concerning these things. When the Lord, to try them in this, upon their reaching Emmaus "made as if he would have left them, then they constrained him, and said to him, Abide with us here this night." And so they obtained a further communion with him. The real unbeliever never enquires much into spiritual things. It is the mark of a gracious influence upon the heart, when any are anxious to use opportunities for getting enlightened in the truth and taught of God in the way of life and salvation.

Try, then, beloved, by these particular marks, what is the state of your mind as to seeking the knowledge of the truth and obtaining a fitness for the eternal world. Do your doubts and your darkness make you sorrowful? Are the subjects of Divine Revelation the frequent subjects of your thoughts and your conversation? And are you diligent in search and enquiry to know more and more respecting them? Do you often beseech the Lord, if not in the exact petition of these disciples, yet at least in its spirit, "Lord, abide with us that we may hear thy word?"

III. Then to you, dear brethren, finally, we present from this narrative *the gracious and special encouragement* which it gives to all such seekers, by showing the power there is in Jesus to overcome all their difficulties which lie in their way, and to make the means of his word effectual to open their eyes and enlarge their heart. While he was talking with them and opening the Scriptures, their "hearts burned within them," and then "when they sat at meat, he took the bread and blessed it, and gave it to them, and then their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight." Convinced and enlarged by the common witness of the word, then a miracle was granted and superadded. They saw that

he was risen from the dead. They saw that he had “holden their eyes.” They felt that now he had “opened” them. Then, by an act of Omnipotent power, he “vanished out of their sight.” The disciples, comforted and quite established in the faith, no longer forsook Jerusalem, but instead of abiding the night, as they first intended, at Emmaus, they “rose up that same hour and came to the city to the other disciples with singleness and gladness of heart.

One remark and I have done. Observe that he at the last was known to them in *the breaking of bread*. My Christian brethren, let me again once more remind you that this is a precious ordinance,—a season of special privilege and peculiar favour. Let this narrative supply you with special encouragement to persevere in that exercise. Be strengthened and refreshed by the view of what this breaking of bread was to these two afflicted disciples: “their eyes were opened and they knew the Lord.” The Lord, in their instance moreover, “made as if he would have left them,” but they “constrained him” to continue. You, on the contrary, rather he is beseeching:—“Come unto me, ye weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.—Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Labour not for the bread which perisheth, but for that which endureth to eternal life. Every one that thirsteth, come, without price or money to the living streams of salvation, and whosoever will, let him take of them freely as the gift of God.”

SERMON XXV.

DIST. III. OPERATIVE. SEC. I. EXAM. IV.

ZACCHEUS.

And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham : for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.—Luke xix. 9, 10.

OUR operative distinction in the work of real conversion has been established to be this,—a distinction in the nature of the actual operation of the Spirit upon different individuals, owing to the variety of their natural dispositions and turn of mind :—that with some who have a meek and implicit temper, a tender conscience, a susceptible, impressive mind, it is frequently a mild and a gentle process by which the Spirit brings them to Christ, and guides them into truth. The word distils as the dew ; their heart is opened at once by Divine Grace ; they are drawn at once with the cords of love :—but with others of a different sort that operation of grace is a more laborious and conflictive exercise ; there is more to detect and contend with,—rebellious opposition, inordinate affections and strong besetments, inveterate evil habits, and Satanic influences. We have noticed already *three*

such instances,—the *unbelief* of the disciple Thomas,—the *self-reliance* of Simon Peter,—and the *dulness and blindness of discernment* in spiritual things which was seen in the two disciples, Cleopas and his companion, journeying to Emmaus, concerning whom the Lord said that they were “fools and slow of heart to understand what the prophets had spoken concerning his sufferings and entering into his glory.” These are common and frequent obstructions to the work and effect of grace; they are those by which many sincere disciples are let and hindered, kept back from a full assurance, and harassed by the enemy of souls;—an evil heart of unbelief within them,—or the lack of a self-distrusting, implicit, contrite spirit,—or a constant slowness of heart to perceive and enjoy the spiritual nature of revelation and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But of these, or any other very strong obstructions and besetments we have further to remind ourselves that they also exhibit the final victory of Divine grace, through the faithful compassion of Christ and the power of his resurrection. Was the disciple Thomas so tied and bound by the power of unbelief as to have resisted all credible evidence, and even to have made a most wilful resolution “Except this thing be granted me, I will not believe?” What was his state of mind before many days were past? Thomas said unto Christ, “My Lord and my God.” Did Simon Peter so blindly rely on his own sincere resolutions and trust to his arm of flesh as at last to open a door for the Devil to come in like a flood, desiring to have him and to sift him as wheat, so that his faith was well nigh failing? His Lord and Saviour was watching over him; he suffered him to be chastened by many a sore temptation and risk of falling; he prayed for him that his faith should not fail; he looked upon him and brought him back to repentance; he poured out upon him at last the gift of the Holy

Ghost, and made him particularly marked for a meek and humble spirit* and a wise dependence to be “kept,” as he says in his epistle, “by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” Or were those two disciples, Cleopas and the other, slow of heart to understand and receive the truth as it is in Jesus? The Lord it is said, opened their understandings, explained the Scriptures to them, brought to their perfect knowledge all that was in the Word concerning him, and made their hearts to burn within them.

The person concerning whom the words of our text are spoken is another—a *fourth* example of natural difficulty and obstruction of habits and disposition in the way of renewing grace; but also and equally overcome and prevailed over by it. The natural difficulty which his character exemplifies is a *covetous, gain-getting, worldly mind*;—a state which, partly by original disposition, and partly acquired by habits and occupation, is perhaps the most prevalent hindrance to true religion amongst mankind. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is a kingdom not of this world. Its command is “Lay not up treasure on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but sell that ye have, and give to the poor, and lay up treasure in heaven.” But men refuse to acknowledge this claim upon them; they are content to resign their eternal prospects for the pleasures of sin for a season, and for the sake of the love of this present world content to be the enemies of God and not have the love of the Father in them. Such was the character of the person alluded to in the text, until the compassion of Christ had found him and turned his heart. To bring it home to ourselves, let us notice in succession the three points of his history which this presents to us;

* See Acts iii. 12.

I. His *previous state*, when he was, as the text says, a "*lost*" sinner ;

II. His *then recovery*, when the "Son of man came to seek and to save" him ;

III. His *subsequent character*, as far as it is developed, when "*salvation had come to his house.*" "Jesus said to him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham : for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

I. Let us notice, in the *first place*, his *previous state*. Two or three particulars are mentioned. His name was Zaccheus. He lived at Jericho. To judge by his name, and by his allusions to the Mosaic law, and by what the Saviour called him—"a son of Abraham,"—he was a Jew by birth ; yet he was "the chief of the Publicans"—a Gentile, Roman office, wanting not much iniquity. "He was rich." He had been unjust, had gotten some of his possessions by fraud, by violence, by usury, or at all events, as himself confesses, by "false accusations." He was called by the Pharisees "a sinner," a name which they seldom applied to any of their own nation, except to publicans and harlots on account of their great and notorious sins. We may resolve all this into *two points* of notice respecting him.

1. In the *first place*, it is evidently intended that we should infer from this account of Zaccheus, that he was to the full extent what the Gospel calls, in the condemnatory sense of the word, "a rich man ;" such an one as of whom it is said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." He was evidently one that loved and lived for the Mammon of unrighteousness, and this is the rule of our Lord, "ye cannot serve God and Mammon." There have indeed been in-

stances, and still there are, where those who are rich in this world are brought by Divine grace “not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God,” to do good, and be rich in good works, “laying up in store a good foundation for themselves for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” Such was Joseph of Arimathea, and such, after this meeting with Christ, became Zaccheus. But instances such as these are as one in a thousand. Of others on the contrary we read;—of one that “died and was buried, and being in torments lift up his eyes in hell;”—of another who had many desires and much sincerity, but nevertheless, after asking the way to heaven, he “went away sorrowful into the world, because he had great possessions;”—of a third who said to his soul, “Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years,—eat, and drink, and be merry;” but God pronounced him a fool and said “This night thy soul shall be required of thee:” and then said the Lord, in applying the example to others, “So is every one that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.”

2. Further, however, than this, we gather from this account of Zaccheus, that he was not only a rich man in the carnal sense of the word, but that, up to this time when the Saviour came to visit him, he had been, what many that will be rich and so fall into temptation are, *an unjust man and an extortioner*. He was the chief of the Publicans, and himself confesses that he “had taken from men by the means of false accusations.”

The office of a publican was to collect the Roman revenue—the taxes imposed on the provinces, and the fines and customs imposed upon individuals, through the Roman empire. The men who held the office were notorious for their injustice and for their plundering

the people. They had only to bring a false accusation against a person, and then they could levy a fine on him, or extort a remuneration in private for not enforcing it. It was an office especially odious to the Jews after they came as a nation under the Roman power ; and if any of their own people undertook it, as Matthew and Zaccheus appear to have done, it was looked upon by them, and perhaps not without reason, as a venal sin. They even considered them to be to them as the heathen ; they would not receive their gifts at the temple, any more than they would the price of blood or of prostitution ; neither would they admit them to join in the public prayers.* Indeed so notorious was the office for violent fraud and plunder, that even Theocritus, an heathen writer, when he was asked—‘ which was the most cruel of all beasts ?’ answered, ‘ Among the beasts of the wilderness, the bear and the lion ; among the beasts of the city, the publican and the courtier.’† Such therefore was Zaccheus as to his former life ;—a man devoted to Mammon, and that the Mammon of unrighteousness, obtained perhaps in a great degree by unrighteous and unlawful means : he was sinfully given up to possessions sinfully acquired. Let us make upon this, brethren, two or three brief remarks. I shall put *three* different cases of different degrees of subjection and carnal slavery in which a person may be to the “ Mammon of unrighteousness.”

(1.) There is, *first*, the state of *avidity*. The Scripture frequently speaks of those who are and profess to be *the people of God*,—but who are, nevertheless, under this strong temptation of a covetous, careful, money-getting, and money-saving disposition. It is their particular hindrance—their peculiar besetting sin. “ They that will be rich fall into temptation and

* Lightfoot, Hor. Heb. in Matt.—Grot. ad Matt. xviii.

† Theoc. apud Musonium.

a snare: some having coveted after it have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* There are many of whom we must hope that they are on the whole the Lord's people, who are nevertheless grasping this world as if they expected or wished to live in it for ever and ever, and griping as hard as the closest miser at every penny of its accursed thing. We do not accuse them of actual, palpable dishonesty, but they are driving their bargains even as others, in the very spirit of the evil world, and just in that spirit are buying and selling and getting gain. They just reverse the apostle's rule, esteeming that "gain is godliness," instead of agreeing that "godliness with contentment is great gain."

My brethren, let us remind you of two things. Let us tell you that this disposition is just the gist and substance of the carnal mind's opposition which there is towards God in fallen nature, and to which you are suffering yourself still to be tied and bound. You are loving the creature more than the Creator, and preferring the perishable riches of time to the unsearchable riches of Christ, yea, durable riches and righteousness. And let us also remind you that God is a "jealous God," and that if you are really his children you will certainly find it out by his smiting you that he may heal you, and sending his rod of chastisement, and withering your gourds, and breaking your broken cisterns. You will meet the correction you stand in need of, by his blasting your creature enjoyments, and fetching you back from your wanderings to give your heart to him. "Thou hast made me, O Lord," says St. Augustin, "and my heart is unquiet till it come to thee. O my heart, every creature disappoints and expels thee from them, to make thee ashamed, and to make thee go to God. They do, as it were, speak words and say to thee,

* 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

'Miserable being, why dost thou adhere to me? I am not the good which thou requirest.' O my soul, why dost thou thus go thirsting among the creatures, to beg some drops that will rather provoke thy thirst than quench it? Why dost thou leave that everlasting fountain, where thou mayest be satisfied with what may be had in God?"

(2.) Then, *secondly*, there is the state of *independence*: there are others, and perhaps in considerable number, who are also not, like Zaccheus, obtaining their Mammon by means evil, but conscientiously and honestly; neither, perhaps, like those we have been describing, do they show such avidity as did Zaccheus in the act of obtaining it. The state of these persons, however, is one step further onwards in the evil effects of riches. What is their state, then? Why the *ease* which their Mammon gives them—the state of secure *independence*—the temporal comforts which surround their path in life are lulling them asleep in religious indolence and atheistical forgetfulness. Although, as to this world, they are of quiet, benevolent, domestic characters, still they come under this description,—“those that forget God.” For need we tell you, brethren, that the Scriptural estimate of the carnal and the ungodly is that they are “men of the world and have their portion in this life; and that they call the lands after their own name, they are full of children and leave the rest of their substance to their babes:” whereas this, on the contrary, is the estimate of the believer,—that he is “a stranger and pilgrim upon earth; that he is living for a blessed immortality, and daily striving to acquire a meetness for it; that he is saying, as descriptive of the habitual state of his heart, “then only shall I be satisfied when I awake up after thy likeness, and behold thy face in righteousness.”*

* Psa. xvii. 14, 15.

(3.) *Thirdly*, there is the state of *injustice*. There is, besides these which have now been mentioned, another description of persons, who are not only, like Zaccheus, devoted and given up to earthly cares and possessions, but, also like Zaccheus, acquiring those possessions by *unjust and unlawful methods*. It is impossible to shut our eyes to the fact that this is the state of trade and business all around us. It is the old sin of the ancient Israelites,—a false weight and a deceitful balance. Persons get on in these things by degrees, by little and little; even religious persons, till they warp their consciences into this sinful state, and then at the last they can do it without compunction. They can wipe their mouth and say ‘I have done no harm; tush! the Lord careth not for it.’ I say there is much—there is very much of this, for which many will suffer in the great day, and even some of the redeemed be tried with fire. It may be so contrived, perhaps, as to escape the detection of human law;—(even to this it is as near as it can be; the rule of conduct with such is not what is fair and equitable but what is the utmost they may gain unjustly without penalty:)—it may, I say, pass without human chastisement, but it is a sin that will certainly damn the soul, and appear in judgment against the doers at the judgment-day.

Now then, this, my friends, was the *previous state* of this man Zaccheus;—the state of natural obstruction to the work of converting grace upon which we speak at this opportunity. With one more remark I shall leave it and pass onward. It is this. You will observe that this state of Mammon-love is here pronounced to be a “*lost*” state—the state of a lost soul. The Lord declared respecting his visit to this individual, that it did exemplify the purpose of his coming to the world, viz. to “seek and to save the lost.” A man who lives in this way to serve the un-

righteous Mammon is a lost man. Such an one cannot serve God. He is living in the spirit of fallen nature ; and if God as a jealous God does not drive him by gracious chastisement to seek his portion in him —in him his everlasting enjoyment before he leaves this world, that man will die in his sins, and resign at the last his earthly possessions, to exchange them for the fire that is never quenched and the worm that never dies.

II. and III. Combining now our *second* and *third* particulars, let us notice, concerning Zaccheus, the *act of his present recovery* at the time when the text was spoken, that is, when “the Son of Man came to seek and to save him”—and the *development of his subsequent character*, that is, when “salvation had come to his house.” I shall note the facts of the narrative, and then make some applicatory remarks upon them.

Jesus came to Jericho where Zaccheus resided. As he “passed through” the city a great multitude of people appears to have followed him, and “pressed” him and thronged him. Zaccheus was a man “of little stature.” He “sought to see Jesus who he was, but he could not for the press,” being lost and covered in the crowd through the littleness of his figure. He therefore “ran before” him, in the way by which he saw he was passing, and “climbed up into a sycamore tree” that he might be able “to see him.” The crowd moved onward and Jesus came to the place. Then, in the presence of all the people, he “looked up” into the tree, and fixed his eye upon Zaccheus ; and although Zaccheus had never known him, yet he called him by his name and said to him these words, —“Zaccheus, make haste, and come down ; for to-day I must abide at thy house.” Zaccheus “made haste, came down, and received him joyfully.” And then, be-

fore all the people, while they were “murmuring” at Christ for “going to be a guest with a man who was a sinner,” Zaccheus justified the Lord’s forgiveness and grace to him by the public profession of repentance and restitution which, invoking so many witnesses, he stood and made before them. In the presence of all the public in the city where he lived, whom as a publican he had oppressed and injured, he made this solemn declaration, and thereby established the holy and purifying tendency of Christ’s doctrine, and refuted the calumny that the Lord by going to his house was conniving at his iniquity, “Behold it, Lord! the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold ! “ Then said Jesus, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham : for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

1. Observe then, from this narrative, in the *first* place, another of many instances which we have had to notice, of the *sovereign freeness of Divine grace*. Jesus entered and passed through Jericho, spending one day in the city. Multitudes of people, no doubt of all kinds and characters, came around him. Only one circumstance, however, is related before he took his departure, and set his face for Jerusalem. And what is this ? salvation coming to the house of this rich extortioner,—this chief of the Publicans,—or, almost synonymous, this chief of sinners ! A man abhorred by the people as to them a heathen and a sinner,—a man of wrong and injustice,—a man who had so far deviated from his own Jewish faith as to become a Roman publican,—a man, too, as to his outward appearance so deformed and of little stature that, unable to see the Lord for the multitude, he gets up into the sycamore,—and yet this is the man to be singled out from the people,—this is the man for whose everlasting

salvation Jesus had come to Jericho! There was a pressing necessity, owing to the purpose and counsel of God, that the Lord should come and visit him: "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must," (the original is still stronger,—to-day there is necessity that I should) "abide at thy house."*

Now here is a freeness in grace, and yet also a sovereignty. While the grace that bringeth salvation is freely offered to all mankind, there is no difficulty in supposing that there are particular instances, wherein God who is over all may choose to display the exceeding riches of that grace, and of his loving-kindness, in calling the chief of sinners, even in the midst of his sins,—in being found of those that sought him not, that they may be for a pattern of his long-suffering, and hereafter be in the eternal world the everlasting monuments of his divine benignity. Let the sinner therefore, amongst us, whoever he be, that is heavily pressed with his sins, and would fain lay hold of forgiveness and grace in Jesus Christ,—let such be encouraged to believe that Christ is indeed able and willing to "save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him," and that if they will seek to return by him "to the Father, as the way, and the truth, and the life," "their sins though as crimson shall become as wool, and though they have been as scarlet, shall be made white as snow."

2. Observe, however, in the *next* place, that there is not in this narrative any encouragement to a presumptuous reliance on the sovereign purposes of God, in the gifts of his grace and the actings of his election, where there is *not in the mind of the sinner any anxious and careful seeking after it*. There certainly was, on the part of Zaccheus, a considerable eagerness with

* Gr. δει με μετηγα.

regard to Jesus. He “*sought*,” it is said, “to *see* Jesus;” and because he could not for the press of the people, he *ran*,—“he ran before them and he *climbed up* into a tree.” I admit indeed that this running and getting up into the tree was an outward manifestation, and that it is open to your objection, ‘Might it not be from curiosity,—mere curiosity,—like that of the rest of the people? how do we know it was any thing more than this?’ But then to this we may at least answer, ‘How do we know that it was *not* more than this? Might there not also have been some inward disquietude because of his evil life—some workings of conscience and strivings of desire to know the doctrine of Jesus? God only knows the heart. The eyes of our risen and living Lord as a flame of fire are fixed upon it. He knows who are truly seeking him and honestly wishing for his salvation; and he will adapt his grace and assistance to them according as their need or their strength shall be. Even those who are under personal disadvantages, like Zaccheus, who was hindered by his deformity from finding a place amongst the multitude,—or like the cripple at Bethesda, who had none to put him into the pool,—yet if, by the grace of God, they have their desires to see Jesus and to be healed of their plague, the compassion of Christ shall find them, and help and save them with a great salvation.

3. *Thirdly*, observe, from this narrative, that the doctrine of grace was *justified*, in the case of Zaccheus, as it is always justified in true believers, by the *production of good and holy fruits*. The Pharisees murmured (all the self-righteous murmur at every penitent sinner who is owned and blessed by the Lord and Saviour) that the Lord should go to the house of a man that was a sinner, and be a guest with him. Then Zaccheus stood forth and said, (and heavenly “*wisdom was justified of her child*,”) “Zaccheus

stood forth and said, “Behold it, Lord!” in the presence of all these witnesses, who have known the faults of my sinful life, I here profess my repentance and pledge my future conduct;—“behold it, Lord! the half of my property I will give at once to the poor;”—(let it go;—with a willing mind I bestow it;—I have gotten instead of it durable riches and righteousness;—as for this evil Mammon, at once the half of it I give to the poor and needy:)—the half of my goods I *will* give, yea, here I *do* give to the poor: and, moreover than this, “whatever I have taken from any by false accusation and injustice, I restore them fourfold.” You see the simple, earnest penitence, and humble declaration of restitution, of this repenting publican was made to honour Christ, and to silence at once the cavils of his accusers that the man was a sinner against the law. It was written in the Jewish law, and it was the same in the Roman law, whichever Zaccheus might be judged by, that if any had stolen a sheep he should render for it four sheep to the man from whom he had stolen it, and then the law was satisfied. If, however, he repented before detection, and made restitution of his own accord, he was only to give back the stolen goods, and a fifth of the value beside it. Zaccheus, in abhorrence of his former life, reckons himself at the worst, the farthest point of the law, and pronounces himself in a fine to pay the uttermost farthing.

Surely here is an answer, a full, triumphant answer to all the cavils of proud, self-righteous sinners that the Gospel leads to licentiousness! Is it not rather shown to be the method, the only method to keep the law and to make it honourable? Does it not lead to a tender conscience and a jealous hatred of iniquity? Does it not cause every true disciple to say, “I hate the sins of unfaithfulness, and all false ways I utterly abhor—there shall no such cleave unto me?”

Beloved brethren, would that you were desirous,—(we trust that some of you are, but alas ! we mourn and grieve that so many are not,)—but would that you were desirous, like Zaccheus, that you might see Jesus ! Would that you were running, as he did, or as “the hart to the water-brook,” surmounting every obstruction, that you might see and know him ! When shall this be the case with you ? O determine that you will seek to attain it, or else determine that you never will. Determine to seek after Christ, and to make your covenant with God. Then shall you certainly find him. Then shall salvation come to you and your house, be upon you and your children ;—then he will virtually say to you, as he did say to Zaccheus, “Make haste, and get thyself ready, for to-day I must be at thine house.” And then shall you be, by your changed and converted life, and by your eternal salvation at last in heaven, an everlasting monument of the exceeding riches of his grace. You shall be to the Lord and Redeemer for a trophy for ever and ever of his redeeming love.

Yes,—beloved,—this is the foolishness of preaching,—but this is the truth of Jehovah,—that publicans, and harlots, and sinners of every character, of every name and nation, washed, and justified, and renewed, and sanctified, go into the kingdom of God ; and *are* there, and *shall be* for ever and ever the fruits and the trophies of redeeming love :—yes, of the Father’s electing,—of the Spirit’s ordaining,—of Christ’s redeeming love.

SERMON XXVI.

DIST. III. OPERATIVE. SEC. II. EXAM. I.*

LYDIA.

And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there; and she constrained us.—Acts xvi. 14, 15.

WE have lately considered some different instances of Conversion which were rendered remarkable by peculiar *difficulties* with which Divine grace had to contend in the *natural disposition*. The character described in this text will now supply us with an instance of the opposite tendency. It is an interesting example of beautiful Christian simplicity,—of that “meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price,”—of that honest and good heart, which prepares an individual to receive the incorruptible seed, and to bring forth afterwards from it thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold. We may say that

* I omit, however, the kindred example of Mary, or the opposite one of Martha which would have pertained to the previous section, because we have not their first conversion recorded.

this case of Lydia and that of Mary the sister of Lazarus the two most striking exemplifications recorded in Scripture of the lovely and gracious character of true religion. At the same time we bring this character before you as a particular and peculiar one; certainly not to imply that all other persons should expect, or perhaps even seek for, exactly the same disposition, but rather to caution many against distressing their minds because they have not been able to find it in themselves. It has been one design of this part of this course of sermons to establish this point,—that the minds of men are essentially different from each other, and their natural dispositions cast in different moulds: so that one is no rule for another. Self-examination and self-knowledge are more to be desired than mutual comparisons. One may be quite as much turned and converted to God, or even a great deal more so, who is of an active, intelligent, zealous, impetuous spirit, but who has many internal struggles with the strong assailments of the Devil, and who is often passing through deep waters, and spiritual trial, and mental sadness, and who is thus being made a tried and experienced character, so as to be able to comfort and edify others with the comfort and teaching with which he is comforted and taught of God:—such an one, I say, may have a more large and effectual influence of Divine grace upon him than one who is gently and quietly led by the Lord and Saviour to walk beside the still waters and to lie down in the green pastures of Gospel consolations. One who is driven by the terrors of the law, and also thereafter by frequent chastisements and painful discipline, may be quite as real a disciple as one who is drawn by the cords of love. Let us, however, examine this case of Lydia, in the hope that it may also be useful to many who are probably being dealt with much in the same manner as she was by the Lord who careth for them.

I. The *first* point of notice in the short account which is given of this disciple is *her Gentile or heathen origin*. This we infer from her name,—Lydia—which was no name amongst the Jews, but appears to have been given her in reference to the country to which she belonged: inasmuch as she was “of the city of Thyatira,” which city was on the border of the province of Lydia in Asia Minor, and was supposed to belong to it. She was now, at the time the apostles found her, living at Philippi, in Macedonia, as a seller of purple cloth.

I suppose it is quite impossible for any of us, who are born in a Christian land, to have any thing like a sufficient estimate of the dreadful abominations and wicked lusts and cruelties of the state of Pagan idolatry. It is true that different travellers and many of our missionaries in all quarters of the earth have transmitted us some accounts of it. It is true that the page of ancient history, yea, even that of our own land in the days of its heathen darkness, is one continued narrative of murders and sensualities. Persons may, we admit, get some little notion from these things of the wretched condition of the heathen in all lands. Nevertheless, one must have been an eye witness,—one must have entered the gates of a heathen city, and walked in its streets, and into its idol temples, in order to calculate the wickedness which rules and reigns amongst them. It is now undeniably, since further light has been thrown upon it, that all their mythology is only a scheme and device of Satan to pamper the natural fleshly lusts, and to gratify the natural cruelty; and that thus he is blinding their eyes and leading them captive at his will.* Civiliza-

* One of the most remarkable instances is here mentioned in proof of this assertion. It is from Mr. Norris's journey in 1772, and Mr. Bowdich's in 1817, to Western Africa. “The king of Dahomey usually keeps his wives up to the number of three thousand. All the unmarried females throughout the kingdom are esteemed his property, and are brought

tion, independent of religion, restrains by interest, and covers with deceitfulness the natural character of man as a fallen creature: that natural character is seen in his savage state in all its ugliness, and pride, and passion, and deformity. Let the descriptions suffice us, which the apostle Paul has given of an unconverted world: "Walking," says he of the heathen, "in the vanity of their minds—having the understanding darkened,—sacrificing to devils and not to God:—who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness." And again;—because they have "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator, for this cause God gave them up to vile affections; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness,—murder,—deceit, malignity."* This heathen state, brethren, is still the state of a great deal more than half of this present wicked world: and this, it would appear, was the state, as to her birth and nation, from which it pleased Almighty God to deliver this disciple. There are, of course, none of us who have been born in her circumstances, in a heathen land: but are there not some—doubtless, verily, there are,—who have lived, we admit in a Christian country, but still in a state of heathenism,—of darkness and the shadow of death? Do I not speak to some who are now it may be awakened to spiritual truth, their hearts the Lord has opened, but they will freely subscribe their confession that the state of their early and former life was, as to its spirit and moral condition, exactly adapted to that description which I have just quoted of the heathen? Were you not of the number of those that forget God? Were you not living in sinful vanity and fulfilling the de-

to the customs to be placed at his disposal. He selects for himself such as appear most beautiful and engaging. At the death of a king of Ashantee, two or three thousand of victims, for the most part of these wives, are slain upon his tomb for an idolatrous sacrifice."

* See Rom. i. 18.—32 and marg. refs.

sires of the flesh and of the mind? Were you not led captive of the devil in the three great sins of fallen nature,—the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life? Truly what an evident need there is of sanctification and Divine renewal, before any natural mind can be fit for the kingdom of glory!

II. The *second* particular, however, in the history of this disciple Lydia, is her *removal of residence*,—a matter of infinite moment to her as it regarded her eternal salvation. She appears, by some Providential circumstances, either perhaps by her settlement in life, for she seems to have been the head of a family, (“she was baptized, it is said, and her house,”) or else by the calls of her business as a seller of purple cloth,—but by some Providential circumstances she appears to have left her native city Thyatira and to have come to reside at Philippi. Philippi, it is true, was likewise a heathen city as well as Thyatira; and at both, it is true, the word of the Lord obtained access; still, nevertheless, it was in the Providence of God that here, at Philippi, she should meet with the Lord’s apostles and have the Gospel preached to her.

It is a solemn consideration, what a mutual working there is between Providence and Grace; I mean between the events of life which appear at the time to be only accidental, and the secret purpose of God to make them instruments of mercy, either as means of grace if profitably used, or else, if abused, a witness of final judgment. It has been well said by some one ‘that upon a man’s going down one street instead of another may depend his everlasting salvation.’ It is worthy of note that the whole of the blessing which dying Jacob pronounced on the tribe of Zebulon was just the assignment of the bounds of their habitation,—the place where they should sojourn: “Zebulon

shall dwell at the haven of the sea, and his border shall be unto Zidon." And what was the sequel? Why there in the land of Zebulon the Saviour came and sojourned. "The land of Zebulon," says the prophet Isaiah, "and the land of Naphtali ;—upon them which sat in darkness and the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."* Truly it would fill us with awe if we could look into these secret workings of God's purposes, even concerning ourselves, in all the events of Providence which surround us on every side. Some, perhaps, are dealt with in judgment for grace neglected ; they are taken from the Gospel, or the Gospel is taken from them ; they are removed as it were the converse way, from Philippi to Thyatira. It will be able to be said to them in the judgment-day, 'Why did you not hear and profit when such an one spake such a word to you ? when such an accident warned you ? when such a bereavement or sickness afflicted you ? when such a sermon was preached to you ? Ye rejected my counsel and would none of my reproof. Now I will also laugh at your fear, and mock at your calamity.' But others there are who have come from Thyatira to Philippi :—they are brought by a gracious guidance out of their natural, carnal, heathen condition, and from their first habitation, which, with all the religious advantages, whatever they were, was never able to witness their calling of God ;—they can say however now, concerning their present dispensation, 'The Lord has opened my heart to attend to the things which are spoken ; the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage.'

III. Notice, however, in the *third* place, concerning this interesting person, her *previous measure of serious impression*, (I will not call it religious,) before the Lord opened her heart—before she heard the apos-

* Gen. xliv. 13. Isa. ix. 1, 2.

tle. It is said that she was one “ who worshipped God,”—that is, as all the commentators, I believe, agree, she had become what was called *a proselyte* to the Jewish faith, and that, moreover, in truth and sincerity. She had renounced the abominations of her original heathen idolatries, and had received the truth of the One True God. She had become a pious Israelite.

It is therefore evident that this disciple Lydia had a more than ordinary measure of natural conscientiousness, and seriousness, and carefulness about better things. She had a sensitive, tender conscience. She could not go on in her former sinful belief and practices. The law which St. Paul speaks of as a law of nature and conscience, by which “ those who have no law are a law unto themselves, their conscience accusing or excusing them,” that law intuitively told her, that the end of those things is death, and made her restless and unquiet till she found her way to the Redeemer. And although at this time she did not know the truth, and had never heard the Gospel in all its fulness, and was therefore only in a state of legal obedience, in a burdensome bondage to the law of works, yet still in this she was upright, in this she was careful to keep and obey it, in this she was conscientious.

Many encouraging instances we meet with now of a similar disposition. By a sort of general impression of Divine things upon them, there is a tender conscience, a careful conduct, an enquiring spirit, a serious mind, a correct obedience. They have not indeed seen and rejoiced in the testimony of Jesus, the joyful sound of the Gospel, but they are like Cornelius, like this woman Lydia, like the eunuch of Candace, “ fearing God and working righteousness.” Such are not far from the kingdom of God.

IV. And then, in connection with this, notice in the *fourth* place, her *use of appointed means*; still, I mean, previous to the fact of the Lord opening her heart. We read, in the verse before the text, that “on the *Sabbath-day* the apostles went out of the city to a place by the river side where prayer was wont to be made;—that there they spoke to the women which *resorted thither*;”—and then that one of them, Lydia, which worshipped God, heard them proclaim the Gospel, and “the Lord opened her heart.” Hence it appears, therefore, that having no synagogue in that ungodly city, the few Israelites that dwelt there repaired to a quiet meeting-place, a place of prayer by the river side; and that Lydia was one who resorted thither; that is, it was her custom, and that now she was there amongst them;—and this on the Sabbath-day;—and she was one who did this in sincerity and truth;—she “worshipped God.”

Now then, in this circumstance with respect to Lydia, viz. her use of appointed means, resulting from the former particular we noticed, viz. the reverential fear upon her conscience as one of God’s worshippers,—a sacred, serious, religious fear of the Lord,—in this, I say, we have the key to that work of grace which now took place in her heart, when it pleased the Father to reveal his Son in her, and to bring her into the Church as a true believer.

V. Let us therefore *fifthly* consider, the *solemn event of her conversion*. “*The Lord opened her heart*.” The Lord opened her heart to “attend to the things which were spoken by Paul.”

Mark, brethren, and observe, what the state of the natural heart, the heart that is carnal and unconverted is here implied to be. It is not opened but shut;—closed against the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It

is therefore not attending to any thing said concerning that Gospel, or to the gracious offers of the Gospel, or the claims of the Gospel upon it. Alas ! how many there are who, while the preacher is speaking to them, are plainly sitting and thinking of other things ! They appear to listen to the word for a little, but they do not really attend to it. And we cannot but feel how almost useless it is for such to appear in the house of God at all. Surely it is an unmeaning form, or perhaps even worse, a quieting to the conscience while still it is slumbering on in the slumber of sin and death.

And why is all this, brethren ? It is because the Lord has not opened your hearts, as he did the heart of Lydia. And why has the Lord not opened your hearts ? Because you are not yet persuaded to seek this of him in real earnest. There were many other women who attended with Lydia at the place by the river side where prayer was wont to be made, and they kept their Sabbath with her. The apostles spoke to them all,—they spoke to those women likewise,—but only of Lydia is it said that the Lord opened the heart to attend to what was spoken. And why was it so ? Because she worshipped God. She went in a spirit of prayer and real desire. You may attend with the faithful few who come to this house of prayer to worship God, but unless *you* worship God, your heart, it is likely, will never be opened ;—unless you ask, you will likely never have ;—unless you seek, it is more than likely you will never find. The Lord, I admit, does sometimes show himself “ found of those who seek him not ;” (we must not limit his sovereign purposes, nor shorten his sovereign will,) but, generally speaking, he deals with mankind as free accountable beings, who are told to ask with a promise of having, and to knock that the door may be opened to them. The Lord is offering faith to all men, and

therefore his rule is, “according to thy faith be it unto thee.” The Lord the Spirit bestows the gift of the love of Christ, and sheds it abroad in the heart, and therefore the promise of Christ is, “If any man love me, I will come to him.” God himself is he that worketh in us, both to will and to do, and therefore he says to us, “Work out your own salvation.” The Lord and Saviour, that sitteth upon the throne, is he that opens the heart as he did this heart of Lydia, and therefore he charges us that we open to him ; “Behold I stand at the door and knock,” (he was doing this to his servant Lydia while the apostle was preaching the Gospel to her)—behold I stand at the door and knock ; if any man,—(mark the extent of that promise; it is one of the universals, if I may so express myself:) if any man,—(yes, if *any* man, be he who he may, no matter where, or when, or how, but if any man)—“if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and sup with him, and he with me.”

Still, however, be it again remembered, that we put this instance of Lydia forward as one of those particular examples where the work of evangelical conversion appears to have been, (as it also was in the case of Mary that “sat at the feet of Jesus,”) a gentle, a peculiarly gracious, and, in many respects, an easy process. The Lord would show himself remarkably gracious to her. Her precious soul was very precious before him, and, perhaps for some reason well known to his Omniscience,—perhaps for some ground of necessity through something he saw in her,—it pleased him to give her an easy passage out of darkness and ignorance into his marvellous light. He had seen and loved her sincerity and her earnest desires. Perhaps too, he saw that she was weak and feeble in the faith. And he would “not break the bruised reed,—the smoking flax he would not quench.”

He opened her heart to receive at once the truth as it is in Jesus.

Let it, therefore, brethren, only be seen to by us, that it is our earnest, sincere desire to learn of Christ and to come to him, and to belong to him as his people, and that we are seeking for this, and then let us leave the event with him, that he may give us, according to his own appointment, greater or less of his gifts and graces ; and that he may give them to us sooner or later, according as he knows we can bear to receive and use what he gives us. Let us only be upright and conscientious, and daily be gathering the manna of heavenly truth, and of Divine bestowment, which falls around our tabernacles, and then he will give us whatever he sees to be really needful for temporal, spiritual, and eternal welfare. Then if he sees us weak and feeble disciples, he will gently lead and direct us ; he will not put new wine into old bottles or new cloth on an old garment ; he will make our strength to be equal to our day, and his strength perfect in our weakness. Then it will be as it was with the manna, “he that gathereth much will have nothing over, and he that gathereth little will have no lack.”

Only this I will say, brethren,—if any of you are conscious that the Lord has thus dealt with you,—if he has opened your heart to hear his preached Gospel, and to “attend to” it,—to *adhere*, that is, to *cleave to* it, as the original word very strongly signifies, then indeed have you cause to offer your humble thanksgiving, and rejoice in his Holy Name. Whatever other difficulties still may be in your way, be not discouraged, but rejoice with a thankful spirit. Say, with the wife of Manoah, “ If the Lord had meant to destroy me, he would not have shown me all this mercy.” Continue to wait upon him, in the same appointed means in which he originally called you, and then

dwell in the land and be doing good, and this we promise you by his Holy Word, that it shall be well with you, here and for all eternity. It shall be well with you here,—every thing shall work together for your good :—it shall be well with you in a dying hour,—it shall be well with you at the judgment-day,—it shall be well with you throughout eternity.

VI. We must, however, *sixthly and finally* notice, after this interesting disciple had received the truth as it is in Jesus, and the Lord had opened her heart, then, I say, we must notice the *blessed fruits which it wrought in her*. “She was baptized and her household, and then she besought the apostles, If ye have judged me to be faithful to my Lord, come into my house and abide there.”

1. She was, then, in the *first* place, *exceeding grateful* to those whom the Lord had honoured as his instruments to speak his word to her and to teach her his testimony. She knew that the faith which St. Paul had preached to her was a persecuted faith, and that he had many against him in that city. And she was one that stood by him, and sought to encourage him in his work. At the risk of her own reputation, her safety, and that of her family, she besought him to come to her house, and to make it the Lord’s *Ecclesia*, the Lord’s Church in that city. Yea, she besought and constrained him. And even after that Paul had been cast into prison, she still persevered in her offer, and received him into it ;—as you see by the last verse of this chapter. This I will only say, that this affectionate feeling of those who hear towards those who minister is one very striking and promising proof of a gracious influence upon them.

2. Observe, however, in the *next* place, her *deep humility*,—the beautiful spirit of self-distrust and

meekness : “ If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, then come into my house.” ‘ I am not worthy to judge myself. I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, or that the Church of my Lord should meet there ; but tell me, and solve it for me, am I faithful to the Lord?’ O what a much more promising, gracious spirit, than the legal, self-justifying, proud, professing forwardness of many that hold to the name, and claim the discipleship of Jesus now ! My beloved hearers, there is nothing that gives us a better hope of the state of any, than just this very simplicity, this self-distrust, this anxious desire really to win Christ and be found in him. You are the “ meek whom the Lord will guide in judgment.” You, depend upon it, are those to “ whom he will teach his way.”

3. *Lastly*, (to pass over many other notable things) observe this pious disciple’s *care for her house and family*. They were baptized as well as she. And in praying the ministers of Christ to come and abide at her house, no doubt she was actuated by a desire on their behalf also. She wished to entertain a righteous man and a prophet, that she might, in her seed and offspring, receive a prophet’s reward. Alas ! how different this from many in these our days ! With them to baptize a child is a form if not a festivity ; it is not an anxious desire to recognize in that child an immortal creature, born for an endless, eternal dwelling-place, and therefore to graft it by baptism into the spiritual household, the mystical body of Jesus Christ. And so with such we shall find, that there is in them no desire, no simple, sincere desire, that the Lord or his Church may find a home at their dwelling, or be known and loved in their household, or that his prophets and ministers may bring a spiritual blessing, a prophet’s reward on their family. Yea, rather for the veriest trifle, for a slight engagement or a shower

of rain, they will keep the offspring which God has given them away from his house of worship. Often have I ventured to say it, but now I will say it again, that while such a course is exceeding cruelty, of course, to their children's souls, it is perhaps the most certain mark, on the part of those who do it, of a state, at the present, of carnal ignorance of religion, and awful distance from God. The good Lord look upon us all, and "open all our hearts," that we may "attend to" his Holy Word, and receive it within us as an incorruptible seed, now to be cast on the waters, but hereafter to be found in abundant fruit for everlasting ages!

SERMON XXVII.

DIST. IV. INSTRUMENTAL. SEC. I.

DIONYSIUS AND DAMARIS.

Among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris.—Acts xvii. part of ver. 34.

I HAVE now to direct attention to the *fourth distinction* out of five which I proposed to consider in that work of Divine grace which we call Conversion. There has been considered, hitherto, in the first place a *moral* distinction,—or the difference which arises in the work from the previous moral character, whether such as that of Nathanael, or that of the thief upon the cross. There has been considered, in the second place, a *temporal* distinction,—a distinction of time,—whether that work of grace is effected in early life, and frequently also by slow and gradual instruction, as in the case of Timothy who “from a child knew the Holy Scriptures,” or whether it is effected when the person has attained to maturity in a carnal state, and frequently then by a sudden and powerful calling, as it was in the case of St. Paul, or certain other of the apostles, who received the command of Christ in the midst of their worldly engagements, to forsake all and follow him. There has been considered, in the third place, an *operative* distinction,—or the difference which

arises in the operation of Divine grace upon the heart and conscience from the different natural dispositions with which it has to contend; some of them naturally meek and implicit as Lydia whose "heart the Lord opened," or as Mary who "sat at the feet of Jesus, to hear his word," but others, on the contrary, hindered by difficult impediments and tried with strong besetments, as Thomas with incredulity, Peter, in the opposite extreme, with a hasty and vain confidence, Cleopas and his fellow disciple with a slow and dull apprehension to the spiritual nature of Divine Revelation, Martha, by a cumbersome over-carefulness even in common and lawful duties, and Zaccheus by a worldly and covetous spirit given up to the mammon of unrighteousness. It is of infinite moment to our own assurance and peace of mind that we consider these natural differences and take them into the account in the business of self-examination. It is needful to do so in order to calculate rightly our own susceptibility of a gracious influence, and our own attainment to a gracious character. Some who are very eminently blessed with religious enjoyments, who seldom have any thing of fiery conflict to trouble them or clouds and darkness to overshadow them, may be those who are nevertheless feeble and weak disciples, babes in Christ; but because they are weak and feeble, the Lord and Saviour permits them to "die in their nest,"—because they are his "little ones" he "carries them in his bosom, he gently leadeth those that are with young;"—just as we rear some delicate plant in a hot-house when it is not able to bear the storm and tempest of the wintry winds. Many there are who do thus pass through life, for the most part in perfect peace, and as one has well expressed it, "sing themselves away to everlasting bliss." These have a meek and quiet spirit, a tender conscience, an unenquiring and consenting mind; "as new-born babes they desire" nothing else but "the sincere milk of the word,

and they grow thereby." It is well—it is happy to belong to that number, to be of the little ones of Jesus. A real disciple has no ambition to be greater or higher than they are. If he may but be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, or as one of the hired servants, or as the dogs that eat of the crumbs of the children's bread that fall from the Master's table, this is all his salvation, and all his desire. But then, although it is true that all sincere disciples would be contented and happy with such a state and experience, still it is the will of their Lord and Saviour that some of them should be called to glorify him in the fires, to pass through much tribulation and inward trial, and at last by victorious conquest over in-dwelling corruptions and Satanic resistances to display and to magnify the power of saving grace, by which they are made to be more than conquerors through him that loved them.

Now the fourth distinction in this great work of Conversion shall be called an *instrumental* distinction. I mean by this the difference which there is in that work in different persons, owing to the different *means* or *instruments*, which the Lord providentially uses, to gather in his elect, to add to the Church daily such as shall be saved.

I. The *first* of these, which I shall now proceed to consider, is the *preached word*. This we have exemplified, both as to what was preached and how it affected the hearers, in the case of Dionysius and Damaris.

The circumstances were these. St. Paul in the course of his travels to preach the Gospel came to Athens. Athens was a great and a learned city,—the most accomplished city in all learning and philosophy throughout all Greece, and perhaps throughout all the

ancient world. Paul at his coming found the city “wholly given to idolatry.” He felt himself pressed in spirit to preach the word of life and salvation to them. Wherever he could meet any persons who had any thing of seriousness, even in superstitious and idolatrous devotion, he disputed with them, and even at the peril of life he went out into the market-place every day and “preached Jesus and the resurrection.” The different sects of Philosophers together with the multitude took him, and brought him before the senate. There he boldly declared the Gospel to them, and called upon them all to repent, and to turn from their idols and lying vanities to the living God, and to receive and believe in his Son from heaven, who was raised up from the dead, and should in a little while come at the end of all things to judge the world. Then, when Paul had ceased preaching, his hearers were divided by the word he had preached into three sorts. Some of them mocked ; some of them delayed and postponed their assent to it, “We will hear thee again of this matter ;” and so Paul passed from among them and “departed from Athens ;” but others clave unto him and believed.” Among these last were “Dionysius, one of the senators, and a woman called Damaris.”

This is the narrative ; and in order to a more particular consideration, it naturally divides itself into three points ;

- I. *The previous state of the people,*
- II. *The truth declared by the preacher,*
- III. *And the effects produced on the hearers.*

I. Consider we, first, the *previous state of the people.* 1. “The city,” we are told in the 16th verse, “was wholly given to idolatry, or, as it is in the margin, “the city was full of idols.” Let us try to realize, brethren, what that would be. It is so with many

cities in other parts of the world to this very day. The city was full of idols. That is, according to the customs of idol-worshippers, every man had his household gods—he had his idol of wood, or stone, or silver, set up by his fire-side—a dumb image made by his own hands, which, nevertheless, he blindly believed to be his god, and bowed himself down before it night and day. And then, besides this, their city was full of idol-temples, set apart to twelve different deities, as the chief and principal gods and goddesses, who they professed to believe ruled over the destinies and fates of human beings. These idol-temples were full of human blood, offered in wicked sacrifices; and they were also full of all uncleanness, sensuality, and drunkenness, which were parts of their idol-worship.

2. This was *one* difficulty the apostle would have to contend with, when he came and preached “Jesus and the resurrection.” Then, besides this, we are told, at the 18th verse, of the sects of their wise and learning-proud philosophers. Two out of many of those different sects are there mentioned as coming to an encounter with the apostle; viz. the Stoicks and the Epicureans;—the Stoicks, whose boast was the power of human reason,—the Epicureans, who maintained it to be the duty of every man to live a life of pleasure because there was no hereafter. Athens was a great and a learned city in the disputings and wisdom of this world, and these were some of its sage and wise philosophers.

3. Moreover, besides these, who were the idolatrous part of the people, there were also, it is said at the 17th verse, a number of Jews, and a number of devout persons or Jewish proselytes, who had turned from dumb idols to the Israelitish religion, but still were altogether strangers to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. With these St. Paul also disputed, but they

would be quite as much at enmity against the doctrine he preached as any of the Gentiles around them, yea, even more so than they were: for what St. Paul preached was “Jesus and the resurrection;” and we know what that preaching would be to both those parties. The “preaching of Christ,” and the cross,—the cross the way to the crown,—the cross the pledge of the resurrection,—the dying of Jesus the way to the life of believers—this we know, is to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks, with their learning, foolishness.

4. A fourth mark is mentioned of the state of that wicked city. At the 21st verse this very remarkable account, but alas! very common to all who are in the state of carnal distance from God, is given of all the people. “All the Athenians, and all the strangers which were in the city, spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.” Behold, I say, in that description the universal condition of fallen nature! The heart has departed from the Lord, and then the consequence is, that having no other contenting, satisfying object, it clings to the creature, and creature trifles and concernments, and with a restless anxiety for every changing novelty it is going up and down in the world, saying “Who will show any good?” Alas! for such persons, there is too much truth in that declaration of Solomon, that there is “no new thing beneath the sun, for that which is has been before it, and that which has been shall be thereafter.” All that a man can seek for, except the knowledge and enjoyment of God himself, is “only vanity and vexation of spirit.”

5. And then one thing more is stated, with respect to the condition of Athens when the apostle came to it. It appears that amongst the rest of their different idol superstitions there was just such a glimmering of

mental knowledge, or traditional notice of the Deity, that some of the people, amongst other altars which they had builded, had erected one with this inscription upon it, “To the unknown God.”

This was the state, then, of the people, at the time this blessed apostle—this chosen vessel of Jesus Christ came, by the Providence of God, into its market-place, and preached Jesus and the resurrection. And this, let me tell you brethren, is, as to its spiritual condition, the state of all people who have not tasted that the Lord is gracious, or found the knowledge of his salvation ;—a state of darkness and blindness,—a state of spiritual idolatry ;—a state of uncleanness and inward moral wickedness ;—an ostentation and pride of human reason and false philosophy ;—a life of pleasure in which they are dead while they live :—a constant seeking for some new thing, and idle babbling about it,—and all this mixed with some dark and distant notion of an unknown and unloved Divinity,—a Deity their spirit has never worshipped, —a God whom their conscience and their heart beenighted with error has never known. You that have never yet made your escape, by the power of true religion, from this vain, sinful world,—you that have never yet turned to your God in true, unfeigned repentance,—you that have never yet cared to seek for and find and know him and give him your heart as your reconciled Father in Jesus Christ, as your hope, and your portion, and refuge, and consolation, your present habitation and your eternal home,—you, we pronounce it with confidence, you are in this condition. You do not, indeed, bow down your persons to stocks and stones, but your idols are the creature in all its forms and fascinations,—you are pursuing after subjects of earthly interest in every thing that is new and novel in its nature,—you are indulging the lusts of your flesh and your mind, and you are secretly

opposing the pride and the prejudice of a carnal, un-sanctified reason to the humbling doctrine of the Saviour's cross, and to the near and the certain prospect of the resurrection of the dead, and the fitness, the strictness, the meetness, the holiness called for to make the soul ready to stand in that resurrection. This, we say, is the state—the very identical state from which the Gospel has appeared to awake and arouse mankind. If they remain in that state till life is ended, it is the state of carnal impenitence and of unconversion, and they will die in their sins. It will fit them in no respect to dwell with the Lord and his saints in heaven. It can and it must only fit them to live for ever with the damned in hell. All that believe that salvation is worth their seeking must certainly strive to be changed from this carnal state by the grace and Spirit of God, that they may be turned from those lying vanities, and know him, affectionately know him, not as a distant, misapprehended Deity, but as near to their souls in the One Mediator, Jesus, as a reconciled God and Father.

II. Let us now, *secondly*, consider the *truth* which this holy apostle went and *preached to this people* who were in such a condition. We are taking this case as a case of *instrumental conversion* by means of the *preached Word*. And it is matter of deepest interest to all that are really in earnest to know the truth, and to be made by it wise to salvation, to examine what was the truth—the particular features of truth which were for this purpose preached and put forward by the Lord's own sent and inspired messenger.

You have then the subject matter of the sermon delivered by St. Paul in the senate-house, or the town-hall, of that idolatrous city,—you have, I say, the heads, or principal points of that sermon from the 22nd to the 31st verse of the chapter. 1. He first de-

clared to them faithfully their *awful state of religious ignorance*: ‘Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things, ye are darkened and blinded with vain and ignorant superstitions. I saw an altar with this inscription upon it, To the unknown God.—Ye know not the knowledge of the Lord my God, but him ye ignorantly worship.’

2. He next declared to them what *Revelation had told of the nature, and attributes, power, and kingdom, and glory, of that eternal Deity*: ‘Jehovah hath made the world and all the things therein. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. He dwells not in temples made with hands. He is not benefited, as ye vainly think, by the gifts and offerings of men. He needeth not any thing from them, but giveth all things to them, life and breath, and all things. He hath created all the nations of men on the face of all the earth. He, by his Almighty power and providence, hath seen the end from the beginning, determined the times and ages of all the world, and fixed the bounds of all men’s habitations.’

3. He next declared to the people, what they had never had any idea of, the *actual attainability of a state of approach to this great and glorious Godhead*,—a state of intercourse and communion with him. ‘He hath made men, he says, for this reason, that they should seek the Lord, that so they might feel for and find him. He is not, indeed, far from every one of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being. We are his offspring. The Godhead is not like to gold, or silver, or stone, but every act and power of life within us by which we are living beings we have and we hold it from that living Deity.’ But though he is thus very near to all his creatures, and Omnipresent, and round about them, still there is a nearer, a spiritual sense, in which we must seek for, and feel for,

and find him, that we may be brought nigh into access to him and hold communion with him.

4. He next declared to them *what must take place in the heart of every sinner before he could come thus into access to God,—even the act of evangelical repentance*: ‘The times of that idolatrous ignorance God had permitted and suffered, in the ages before gone by, but now he commandeth all men every where to repent.’ And this is the message still to us, brethren. That word of the apostle has been written in the book : it has become part of the Word of God, and now it is always fresh and always in force upon us. God *commandeth*—it is his absolute, plainly revealed will—he commandeth *men to repent*, that is, to turn from their idols and earthly vanities to seek for the living God, and to give other hearts to him. He commandeth this, moreover, to *all* men. He commandeth it to all men *every where*. And he commandeth it *now*. The voice, my brethren, of this Divine commandment is now at this moment sounded for God in your ears, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”

5. He next declared to them *the motive for repentance*. ‘Because God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead.’ And he declared to them the means and the way of all this by setting that Man before them as the God-man Mediator, the way and the truth and the life. ‘He had died the death. He had been slain as the great Sin-offering for the sins of a guilty creation. He had gone down in voluntary suffering—gone down in single combat to the mansions of death and hell. He was gone up with great triumph and glory to the right-hand of the Father,—

his human nature exalted with him, the Son of God and the Son of Man, to be the living Head of his Church, to pour out upon it the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and at last, on a day which the Father had already appointed and fixed in the counsels of eternity, to come forth in the clouds of heaven to judgment, as the Judge of quick and dead, that every eye might see him, and they also which pierced him, and for all the kindreds of the earth to wail because of him ; even so, Amen.'

Now these several particulars, which this apostle declared to the Athenians, constitute the Gospel of Jesus. Sinners, by nature estranged from God, and alienated by wicked works, God commandeth that we repent. Christ is exalted as Prince and Saviour to give repentance and sin-remission. He is the door to God—to heaven ;—the way, the truth, the life. By him we must come to the Father, and have a true and a saving knowledge of him,—“feel after him and find him.” If this we do, then happy are we ;—if this we do, we are safe and happy when we come to die. A day is appointed for Jesus to judge the world. The Lord and Saviour will then come forth to receive us, and pass that welcome, joyful sentence upon us, “Come ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you before the world was.” But if we remain in the ignorance God once winked at, if we do not come by Jesus Christ to the Father here in this present life before we die, then we shall die in our sins—then that Lord and Saviour shall be revealed against us in flaming fire to consume us with the breath of his mouth and destroy us with the brightness of his coming. This is the Gospel we preach among you, brethren, as God’s appointed messenger, and other than this we have no desire to preach to you,—other than this we have no commandment of the Lord.

III. Now then observe, in the last place, the effects of this preaching upon the hearers that heard the word. And observe, my friends, as you easily may do, the same effects among us—the same effects of the preached Gospel from that day to the present. It divided the hearers into three sorts ;—violent opposers,—careless delayers,—and faithful followers. “When they heard of the resurrection,”—that the dead should come out of their graves and come to judgment, “some of the people mocked : others said, We will hear thee again of this matter, and Paul departed from among them” and they never did. “Howbeit, certain ones clave unto him, and believed, among which was Dionysius the senator, and a woman whose name was Damaris, and others with them.”

1. My dear neighbours and brethren, which of these sorts are you? Few, we trust, that attend this sacred temple would have to rank with the first of these three classes ;—but many alas! there are around us, who live in this place amongst us, but never come to this house of God ;—while we are sitting here at the temple of God, they are drinking their own damnation at the temple of the Devil. They will not listen to the preached word of salvation, but they are the people that mock at the Christian’s confidence,—at his hope of the resurrection ;—‘ How are the dead raised up and with what body should they come? Tush! God careth not for it. How should he bring us into judgment?’

2. But are there not many among you, friends and neighbours, (alas! indeed there are,) who rank with the second description of this apostle’s hearers,—those who delay their repentance and say, as it were, to the preacher, “We will hear thee again of this matter?” Alas! it is an awful reflection, that this state of error is even more soul-destroying than the state of

open opposition. Resolutions are formed for the future but none for the present time : ‘ We will repent some day hereafter, and hear more about this doctrine—When this or that point of desire is gained and accomplished, then we will turn to God.’ And thus by delays and postponements the Devil achieves his purpose. He takes the soul captive and carries it down to hell. It is a solemn remark of an aged Christian clergyman “ that those who *resolve* to delay repentance do not, to the end of their life, ever repent at all.”* And alas ! what an awful event will death be at its appearance to such careless, slumbering sinners ! These delaying Athenians said they would hear the word thereafter but they never did. Paul departed from Athens.

3. But Christian brethren and sisters, ye that are cleaving to the Lord and Saviour, like this Dionysius and Damaris, and those others with them, ye have believed unto righteousness, and ye shall never be confounded. O that the Lord of all power and might would add to the number of such redeemed believers ! that he would awaken impenitent, careless hearers, and add to his Church and people many that shall be saved ! None can do this but the Lord Jehovah. It is only of him that we can be born again. The Word of the Lord is preaching daily, but it is an awful reflection, that it will produce amongst us, as its consequence, such very different fruits ; violent, mocking opposers,—careless procrastinators,—but, in the third place, humble, penitent believers.

* A striking passage is added from a French divine.—“ D’ailleurs, plus vous différez, moins vous en aurez de grâce : car plus vous différez, plus vos crimes se multiplient, plus Dieu s’éloigne de vous, ses miséricordes s’épuisent, ses momens d’indulgence s’écoulent, votre mesure se remplit, le terme terrible de son indignation approche ; et s’il est vrai que vous n’ayez pas assez de grâce aujourd’hui pour vous convertir, vous n’en aurez pas assez dans quelque temps, pour comprendre même que vous ayez besoin de conversion et de pénitence.”—Massillon, *Serm. Delai de la Conversion*.

It shall, however, do all the Lord's good pleasure. It shall accomplish that which he pleaseth and prosper in the thing whereto he sends it. But let us each remember the very different witness that Word shall bear to us in the judgment-day : "He that rejecteth my word hath one that judgeth him ; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

SERMON XXVIII.

DIST. IV. INSTRUMENTAL. SEC. II.

ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.

The place of the Scripture which he read was this—He was led as a sheep to the slaughter ; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth : in his humiliation his judgment was taken away ; and who shall declare his generation ? for his life is taken from the earth.

And the eunuch answercd Philip and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself or of some other man ?—Acts viii. ver. 32—34.

THE last discourse that was preached to you commenced the consideration of our *fourth distinction* in the work of evangelical Conversion ; viz., an *instrumental distinction* ;—the difference which arises from the means which are made use of by the Holy Spirit to do that work in believers. We considered in that discourse the means or instrument of the *preached or spoken word*, as it was exemplified in the conversion of Dionysius and Damaris, after the preaching of Paul at Athens. The next instrumental means which we have to consider is that of the *written word*—the word of Holy Scripture. The circumstance related in the text now read to you affords us a striking example of real evangelical conversion, of which the

sure word of prophecy, as a light shining in a dark place, was the Lord's instrument and directory. The particulars of the narrative concerning this individual I shall introduce as we proceed. And

I. *First*, let us notice some information given us respecting his *previous circumstances*. His name is not told us: but we are informed that he was a man of Ethiopia: he was therefore a negro or man of colour, Ethiopia being his country which was one of the kingdoms of the blacks. Ethiopia for very many years was always governed by queens, who went by the name of Candace. This man was one of the chief officers to one of these Candaces. He was an eunuch, and a man of great authority and high rank in the kingdom. He had his chariot to ride in as a great officer, and when he was at home in his own country he had the charge of all Candace's treasures. Such was the individual who was now about to be enlightened with divine truth, and delivered from the bondage of Satan and sin and darkness into the glorious kingdom of God's dear Son.

Behold, then, in all this the *freeness of the Divine mercy, and the distinguishing grace of God's election*. How encouraging is the reflection which it suggests to us of the wide extensiveness and the abounding fulness of the grace-bestowments and salvation-purposes of the Gospel of Jesus! Not a son or a daughter of fallen Adam, whatever be their circumstances, but a way of salvation is open for them, and a promise shall be formed for them, if they will look to it and come to Christ that they might have life! Here was a man of the distant land of Ethiopia, a heathen, Gentile, dark, benighted land; but says the word of prophecy, "I will make mention of Ethiopia"—"soon shall Ethiopia stretch out her hands unto God." Here was a man that was an eunuch;

but again says the prophet, and now his word was accomplished, “Let not the eunuch say I am a dry tree: for thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs—that take hold of my covenant,—even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.” Here was a man that was rich and mighty in the evil world:—(the greater difficulty was upon him than the camel passing through the needle’s eye;—“not many rich, not many mighty are called;”)—but still there was a promise on record given by the Father in covenant to the Son, “The merchandise of Ethiopia shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine, and make supplication unto thee.” And here was a negro black, an Ethiopiant hat could not change his skin, no more than the leopard his spots; but the Lord could change his heart, for “in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free.”*

Remember this, brethren, and take encouragement from it, that no external circumstances can shut you out from Christ, if he only gives you a desire to be found in him. Only shut not yourselves out by wilful ignorance, wilful impenitence, wilful sin, and nothing else can exclude you. Jonah might call upon him from the very belly of hell, or the thief might offer supplication even from the cross to him, “Lord, remember me,” and take me in to thy kingdom! “The promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call. He shall gather his elect from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, to come and sit down in his kingdom. From the uttermost parts of the earth have I heard songs even glory to the righteous.”

* Psa. lxviii. 31, Isa. xlvi. 14.—lvi. 4. Col. iii. 11.

II. Thus far of the previous circumstances of this remarkable person before this event of his conversion : consider in the *next* place his *previous conduct*. What had he been doing at the time when Philip met him, and how was he then occupied ? He "had come," we are told, "to Jerusalem to worship," and he was then "returning." And as he sat in his chariot, what do you suppose he was doing ? Was he, perhaps, like some some great and mighty nobleman as he was by rank, sitting proudly in his chariot, while his slaves were driving him, or sitting at his ease in the greatness of conscious dignity ? What is the account, then, that is given us ? It is this. He was "reading the prophet Isaiah." He held the book of God in his hand, and as he went through the desert he read aloud to his servants the book of the prophet Isaiah. The mere fact of his having the book with him is a proof of his diligence ; for, be it remembered, there were no printed Bibles then, brethren,—every man that wanted to have one might write a copy for himself, as we find it was required of every king of Israel,* for his own use. At all events any other way of procuring it must have been attended with great cost and difficulty. And we may ask you, brethren, who would do this now ? Who shall be met with in this degenerate, idle age, that would be willing to give himself the trouble to write out the Bible from Genesis to Revelation just that he might have it to read in ? Who is there now to be met with that carries his Bible with him in all his journeyings that he may read in the book of the law,—that when he goeth it may lead him, when he sleepeth it may keep him, and when he awaketh it may talk with him ?

Notice, therefore, in the previous conduct of this Ethiopian nobleman, as it bore on the fact of his final conversion to the truth, the *great pains-taking and re-*

* Deut. xvii. 18, 19.

ligious carefulness there was in him respecting his soul's salvation. If the fact of his distant country and the many circumstances that were against him not having shut him out from a share in the grace of the everlasting covenant, displays to us the freeness of Gospel purpose and the immutability of God's electing love, on the other hand the honest and earnest endeavours which he made to seek to know the truth, and the success which attended them, may teach us both the need and the certainty of that established rule of the divine government, that "he that asketh receiveth and that every one that seeketh findeth." We cannot too much bear in mind that admonition of the Lord and Saviour, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able."

For what, my dear brethren, was the journey which this eunuch had been taking in order to worship at Jerusalem? It was no less than a journey from one quarter of the globe to another,—a journey from Africa to Asia,—a journey of at least one thousand miles, and not a little of it across a sandy desert, just to have the privilege of one visit of worship to the temple of God on Mount Zion, and then to travel it back again to the place from whence he came. Let us just suppose that we were so situated now, brethren;—that salvation were still of the Jews or of some particular nation in distant lands; so that nothing could be known of religion except we took our journey and travelled thither: how many are there amongst us, I should like to know, who would be found willing to set off and go there? Who would be found that would raise the costs, and risk the dangers, and take the trouble, and go, if it were even so far as France or Spain or Italy, to enquire the way to heaven? Some, perhaps, would go for the novelty, or for the amusement;—like the crowds that were going last week to York, not for that they cared very

much for the object they professed to go for,* but to eat and drink by the way. Some, too, might go for ambition ;—like the Crusaders of old, when they went to the Holy Land,—when they went as they thought for religion's sake, but more for their own adventures. But few indeed would be the number that would go one-tenth of the distance really to worship God, or to acquire the knowledge of his salvation. Men, it is true, for gain, or pleasure, or fame, will traverse both sea and continent—to pick up the gold of India or rich Peru,—to visit new regions and distant territories, or to get them a name with their kindred dust and ashes. But few, I say, indeed would be the number that would go one-tenth of the distance really to worship God, or to acquire the knowledge of his salvation. Alas ! on the contrary, here in their native country, at the very threshold of their own habitation, the temple of God is opened, but they will not enter into it. And, verily, this eunuch of Candace shall rise in the judgment-day with the Queen of the South against the people of this generation, and rise against them to condemn them. They came from the uttermost parts of the earth, the one to hear the wisdom of Solomon, the other to the ritual of Moses' law, but alas ! amongst us, a greater than Moses, a greater than Solomon, even the Lord himself, is despised, and scorned, and rejected. Depend upon this, brethren, that this is one certain mark to distinguish a true believer. A true disciple of Jesus must be a diligent, need-convicted, earnest-seeking soul ;—he opens his mouth and pants because he longs for the Lord's commandment ;—his desire is, “ Hide it not from me, for I am a stranger upon earth, as all my fathers were.” A careless, unanxious spirit must, on the contrary, be a carnal, earthly condition. Such have no strong desire, no hungering or thirsting after the Lord and Saviour. Such make no faithful endeavours to know the truth as it is in Jesus. And

* The ten hours' bill.

this will always be the end of it, “The diligent soul shall be made fat, and the hungry be filled with good things, but the rich shall be sent empty away.”

III. Now then notice, in the *third* place, the *careful watching of the Holy Spirit over this eunuch's eternal interests.* God sent him a teacher. We have followed him, so far, to the particular period of time, so important to him in its consequences, when he was crossing a part of the desert, toward Gaza,—going homeward from Jerusalem to his own country Ethiopia,—sitting in his chariot, and reading the prophet Isaiah. He had been to Jerusalem to worship, and to seek for divine knowledge; but doubtless he felt in himself that he had not yet obtained it to his satisfaction, but was going home again without it: doubtless he felt that his soul was not delivered from its burthen and brought into the liberty of God's children. He took the book of God in his hand, and was reading in it, but still he did not understand it. He appeared to himself to be in darkness,—excluded—shut out from the covenant. His feeling was that which he expressed to Philip, “How should I understand this, “except some man should guide me? I pray thee of whom does the prophet speak?”

But, my dear brethren, was he forgotten of our heavenly Father? Surely not so. What is that promise we read of, “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them?”* This is the promise of a faithful God to all that seek him, and let us hasten to observe its fulfilment in the instance before us. Imagine, then, the chariot of this Ethiopian officer passing across the desert,—a wild and dreary wilderness of burning sands as far as the eye can reach. What should he

* Isa. xli. 17.

expect to meet with but serpents or beasts of prey in such a dreary situation? Taking up his Bible, he was closely and busily engaged in reading aloud, perhaps for the benefit of his servants, the book of the prophet Isaiah. At this important moment a human being approached the chariot, and a voice accosted him, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” A most important question, brethren, often to be put to our hearts and consciences when reading the Word of God! The Christian believer will often put it to his own heart;—not merely, ‘Dost thou faithfully read thy portion, or else unfaithfully neglect it?’ not merely, ‘Dost thou spend time in studying and thinking upon it?—but, O my thirsting, and longing spirit, dost thou really understand it? dost thou not only read it, but mark, and learn, and inwardly digest it?’

But who was this strange, unexpected visitor that thus accosted the eunuch, and what had brought him thither? He was the evangelist of Jesus, and the agent that purposely brought him thither for the sake of this eunuch’s salvation was God the Holy Ghost. The Spirit directed him thither; the Spirit when he came there assured him that this was the person; the Spirit gave him utterance to “preach to him Jesus;” and when he had taught and baptized him, the Spirit “caught him away.” The case was this. Philip was preaching the Gospel in the villages and city of Samaria. An angel of the Lord there came to him and gave him this direction, “Arise, and go to the desert between Jerusalem and Gaza.” It was a strange direction;—to send him from a populous neighbourhood where the word was proving effectual, where “the people with one accord gave heed to the things which he spake, and unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of those that were possessed with them, and great joy was in the city;”—it might, I say, have

* Acts viii. 6, 7.

seemed to him a very singular direction, to take him from such a neighbourhood, and to send him into the desert! What did he do then? "He arose and went." He knew that the Lord had some work for him to do there, and this was quite enough for him. Then, and then only, are the servants of Jesus satisfied when they are doing his work and will. Let this be all that we desire, and let us have a good conscience to do it, whether much or little is given us to accomplish,—let our prayer and endeavour be in all things, 'Father, thy will be done! prosper thy Word in that thing whereto thou sendest it!' And then if we gather much, we shall have nothing over, or if little, no lack;—then "though Israel be not gathered, yet shall we be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and our God shall be our strength."

However, what I want us to notice is the faithful care of the Spirit over this enquiring disciple. Perhaps not a creature besides him was at that time crossing the desert. At all events purposely for him Philip is brought there by the Spirit to meet him. The eunuch is reading a precious passage of Scripture, in which all the mystery of godliness—all the substantial truth of the Gospel is contained. For, beloved brethren, this I will boldly say to you,—understand and receive that passage which this eunuch was reading,—receive it affectionately as the words of eternal truth, and you are made by it wise to salvation. But the eunuch could not understand it. It contained indeed the whole that was needful—all that he wanted to make him a happy believer; but he was not able to perceive it. It was a jewel shut up in a casket, and hidden from his view. It was still to that moment a sealed book—the letter that killeth; yea, it was foolishness unto him. Then said the Spirit to Philip, "join thyself to this chariot." Philip obeyed the direction. The eunuch, so intent on his reading,

did not at first perceive him, but continued to read. Philip caught the words ; they spoke of the sufferings of his Lord and Saviour ; and he immediately asked him, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” Then said the eunuch, “How am I able, except some man should guide me?” He desired the evangelist to come up into his chariot. The place in the book was produced and referred to ;—Philip took it as his text and “preached to him Jesus ;”—they “came to a certain water” and the eunuch requested to be baptized ;—the second question of Philip was then addressed to him, ‘whether he believed with all his heart?’—the eunuch made his confession, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God ;”—the evangelist then baptized him,—and then the Spirit that brought him thither “caught him away” from the eunuch, and the eunuch “saw him no more” till Philip met him as his crown of rejoicing before the throne of the Redeemer.

My dear friends, mark, I say, and seriously consider the gracious work in all this of God the Holy Ghost. I consider that the work, in this circumstance, of that blessed Person of the Trinity, who is three times referred to in this short account as planning and effecting this Ethiopian disciple’s conversion, ought to be specially noted by every Christian believer. It ought to be noted and thought upon that it may lead up our minds to that most consoling doctrine—his essential deity, and the personal activity he uses in the covenant of grace and salvation. Are there any of you, brethren, that are ready to mourn, and enquire with feeble confidence, ‘How shall I ever discover the way to Zion? With so many by-ways and false ways, how shall I find the true way, and keep along it throughout to the gates of the new Jerusalem?’ Then think of the all-sufficiency of God the Holy Ghost. Here was a poor disciple with nought but the Jewish Scriptures passing along the desert ; yet even to the

desert the Spirit sent a messenger—the Spirit sent him “an interpreter, one among a thousand to show him the righteousness” which is by faith :—and, depend upon it, this is a faithful promise to all the disciples of Jesus, concerning that Spirit, “He shall guide you into all truth ;”—and this too is faithfully appended to it, “How much more will your Father which is in heaven, give that Spirit unto those that ask him !” You have the whole of Scripture, and along with it you have the Spirit that giveth life.

IV. It only remains that we notice *the passage which he was reading.* It was a passage concerning the great atoning Sacrifice—our Lord and Saviour. It was this, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb dumb before its shearer, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment is taken away, and who shall declare his generation ? for his life is taken from the earth.” It will not be expected that I should now expound this Scripture, as that alone would take more sermons than one. Suffice it to say that it sets forth the suffering, bleeding sacrifice of the Divine Redeemer,—and that, along with a multitude of others, it teaches the soul that is taught of the Spirit that the whole foundation of religious truth is the cross of Jesus. However great be that mystery, and however unsearchable, however it may be a stumbling-block to human pride, or a foolish saying to man’s carnal understanding, yet it contains unsearchable riches,—depths of Divine wisdom and glory which it will take eternity to fathom ;—it is the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth.” All men, before it is revealed to them by their Father which is in heaven, (for it is not nor can be revealed by flesh and blood,) —all men before they understand it, will ask the eunuch’s question, “I pray thee of whom does the prophet speak this, of himself or of some other man ?”

—but all men who are taught of the Spirit, and enabled thereby to receive it, will build their immortal hopes upon it. They will discover in Jesus Christ, smitten of God and afflicted, a greatness, and dignity, and glory to which the world is a stranger ;—they will count all things else but “as dung that they may win Christ and be found in him ;”—they will desire to live in obedience to his Gospel-law,—to do his will upon earth,—and in faith, and meekness, and simplicity to wait for his glorious appearing. And these, beloved, are the people who are redeemed by his death, who are now by his grace in a state of practical salvation,—and who shall, at the last, be admitted into his kingdom. These are the “sheep that shall never perish, but he gives unto them eternal life ; the Father has given them to him, and none shall pluck them out of the Father’s hand.” Here in this world they are so changed and converted by his transforming, renewing grace, that they walk with God in white ;—they are like their Lord who has gone before them, holy, harmless, and undefiled ;—they walk in the light of his countenance and rejoice in his name all the day ;—they walk through the world, in the sight of all men, with his sprinkled blood upon them as the mark and pledge of their redemption. They faithfully keep his testimonies, and at last he will come to receive them, when the mystery of God is completed, that they may enter into his kingdom, and behold his glory. There they shall still be an everlasting monument of the same vicarious sacrifice—the offering up for an atonement the blood of the Manhood of God’s eternal Son.

Finally, let us remember that if we would attain to this saving faith in Jesus, and be joined to this company of his true believers, then we *must seek it in God’s appointed way*. Let us just, for conclusion, recall the particular features of such a state of mind, which

we see in the history of this Ethiopian disciple. Remember, beloved brethren, that he was diligent in seeking. He travelled two thousand miles, in going and returning, to come to the temple of God. He obtained for himself a copy, no doubt most difficult to get, of Jehovah's written Revelation. He earnestly read in that holy volume, even while he rode in his chariot, that he might be made wise to salvation. He was not too proud to receive instruction from a wandering stranger who came and stopped his equipage. Though a great Ethiopian nobleman, and though the first disciples of Jesus had nothing of greatness in their external appearance,—("take neither purse, nor scrip, neither two coats nor shoes nor staves")—though such a stranger now came and stopped his course, yet he desired that he would come up into his chariot.

My friends, these two dispositions,—*diligent seeking* and *deep humility* are two essential particulars of Christian character. Where these are not, there can be no real religion. They are two of the principal features in the disposition of saints. And one thing more I will say of these dispositions,—they are only to be gotten from the Holy Spirit of God; and then they fit us for his further work in us. Then this enquiring disciple had an interpreter sent him to teach him the truth as it is in Jesus.

Seek for these gracious principles,—these heavenly dispositions. If any man lack them let him ask of God. Then shall you know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. Then shall you attain to the same most blessed issue of all these exercises which this Ethiopian attained to,—“he went on his way rejoicing.”

SERMON XXIX.

DIST. IV. INSTRUMENTAL. SEC. III.

ANDREW, SIMON, JAMES, JOHN, PHILIP.

Jesus saith unto him, Come and see.—John i. part of ver. 39.

THE circumstance recorded in this text exhibits the work of Conversion to us effected by the *instrument* of a *direct, immediate call from the Lord and Saviour.** It is not now, indeed, the privilege of any to experience such a vocation, as far as it regards the bodily presence of Jesus;—in our generation we “know not Christ after the flesh;”—but, as to its spiritual efficacy, there is such a thing, and of not unfrequent occurrence, as a manifest exertion of the Divine interference to arrest the sinner in his progress, and, by an act of effectual calling, to pluck him as a brand from the burning. The work is entirely an inward work. The finger of God is laid upon the conscience, and the word of Omnipotent grace is spoken at once to the heart, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit reaches and turns the affections.

* The conversion of Saul of Tarsus has been spoken to already, under the category of *time*, or it might have illustrated also this *means*. It was, however, attended with miraculous evidence. The instance of Matthew or Levi, another of the twelve, is omitted only for its similarity.

The circumstance which exhibits this to us, and which exemplifies this kind of gracious influence, is that of the remarkable conversions which came to pass in the little city of Bethsaida. They seem to have been the beginning of our Lord's ministry. Five of the twelve apostles were called at once out of that one district to the saving knowledge of Christ as the true Messiah that should come into the world. The four chiefest apostles, Simon, and James, and John, and Andrew, and also St. Philip, all of them came forth at once to the Gospel faith and the Gospel ministry from that one place Bethsaida.

What can be the meaning of that Scripture, “Woe unto thee Bethsaida!” Five of the Lord's apostles called and converted out of it, yet notwithstanding, “Woe to thee Bethsaida!” Learn from it, brethren, that the gathering in, out of any particular place, even some of the best and brightest of the jewels of the Redeemer *does not remove the curse from the other ungodly* that are therein. True it is, indeed, that for the sake of the saints that dwell there Jehovah may bear with it and prolong its probation. If there had been ten righteous in Sodom, it had not fallen then. True it is, indeed, that, for the sake of the saints that sojourn in it, the earth itself with its kingdoms, and thrones, and palaces, is not yet melted with fervent heat,—that the stars have not fallen from heaven, nor the moon been turned into blood. But this will not save the world in the time of judgment. The wheat that is in the field will not then save the tares. The good fish in the Gospel-net will not preserve the bad ones. Rather then it will be, “Woe to thee, Bethsaida!” woe to thee Chorazin! yea, woe to thee likewise, Britain, where Gospel-truth has abounded! woe and lamentation to the whole ungodly world!

But rather learn from this, brethren, that the gathering in of the saints from any particular place, so far from atoning for it, *increases that place's condemnation.* "Woe to thee Bethsaida!"—for why? for "the mighty works which have been done in thee." Not only the blind have received their sight, and the sick have been healed, and the dead have been raised to life, but greater than this;—five, *at least*, of the apostles have been from thence called out from the midst of the ungodly, to be monuments of grace and conspicuous trophies of redeeming love; and afterwards to preach the Gospel of the kingdom to their fellow-sinners around them. This is an awful truth;—that the saints in every place—that the saints in the world at large, by the witness for God of their life and conversation, condemn that place and condemn the world. Christian believers! let the light of the truth shine bright and clear in you. Bear a faithful testimony. While you are lifting the standard of the cross, lead a holy and blameless life. And then, "behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish," because of the great, but rejected, work that is worked in your generation. Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! at the day of judgment it shall not be tolerable for thee. Exalted to heaven by privilege, thou shalt be cast down to hell.

And learn from this, likewise, the *greatness of the power and glory of grace in redemption.* From the most ungodly city, so that even the curse of a compassionate Saviour cursed it, are elected and chosen the chiefest of his apostles. From the chief of sinners come forth the chief of saints. O what a great and everlasting wonder at last will be the company of heaven! Perfectly holy—glorious in holiness—light in the Lord—and for ever in the presence of a holy Deity—but once they were darkness—publicans and harlots—adulterers—murderers—drunkards—thieves—blasphem-

mers! Not a sin to be mentioned, but they who once committed it shall be found in glory! And if there be some degrees of that glory, perhaps the greater the guilt that has been pardoned, the higher the exaltation, and the louder the song of praise, amongst the saints and apostles of the Lamb: "Unto him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion! Amen." O what encouragement to guilty and heavily-laden, (but mind one thing along with it) to penitent, contrite, sin-hating seekers after God!

Now the conversion of these eminent saints was on this wise. John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing in the wilderness of Judæa. Amongst those who became his disciples was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Andrew, with another disciple whose name is not mentioned, but very probably St. John, was standing with John the Baptist, when the Lord, beginning his ministry, was passing by them. The Baptist looking upon Jesus, as he walked, cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." Andrew and the other disciple heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance and of this they were already disciples. They had been baptized in Jordan confessing their sins. And now the Baptist, as a witness for the truth, points them to the Saviour as the suffering sacrifice for sins, the suffering Lamb of God. He yields them up readily from being his own disciples, and points them to Christ, that they might be transferred to be disciples to him. He considered his own work to be done with them, viz: by bringing them to Jesus: as he had said before, "that Christ should be manifest to Israel, therefore am I come."

Behold, in this example, the proper character

and the proper office and message of every faithful minister. He is a witness for Jesus. He is not a witness for himself but a witness for Jesus. He is Christ's ambassador;—and who thinks much of the ambassador? Rather the thought is of those that send him and of the subject of his embassy. When the posts of the country convey us a letter from a friend, we think not at all of the hand that brings it, but rather of the person who has written it, and of what is written therein. And so it is with the minister of Jesus. He bears to the world a message from him and concerning him to believers. He is not a witness for himself; he is nothing—has nothing in himself, but he is a witness for Christ. And what he has to do in the world is to preach repentance to all men every where, and then simply to direct them, "Behold the Lamb of God." And however this repeated admonition may seem to be a vain repetition to some, and dull and uninteresting as a tale twice told, still this is the message we are bound to deliver, believing it will prove to be the power of God to salvation, and woe is unto us if we deliver it not. We desire not to varnish or commend it with gifts or words of our own, but simply to say to you from Sabbath to Sabbath, "Behold the Lamb of God." It is recorded of John the Evangelist, that when he was a hundred years old, so that he could not go to the meeting of believers without being carried, no longer able to make any long discourses, he would simply say to them, 'Little children, love one another.' And when they grew tired of always hearing the same concise exhortation, his answer was, 'This it is that the Lord commands you, and this, if ye do it, is enough.' And depend on it, brethren, the rules of truth are few and simple. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, and thou shalt be saved. And if ye love him keep his commandments. For except ye be born again ye can-

not enter into the kingdom of God. Little children, love one another." And if these great truths become uninteresting to you ;—if you are weary of them ;—if they are not always refreshing and always new,—you have something internally wrong in you—you come under that description,—" having itching ears."

But Andrew and the other disciple, "*followed Jesus*" as he walked. The word of the Baptist immediately had its effect in them. Being in the state of repentance, and grief for sin, they heard with gladness that here was the Lamb of God ; and with an earnest desire, and a confidence that he would take knowledge of them, they followed Jesus. And they were not disappointed. Soon "he turned and saith to them," in the way of enquiry, "What seek ye?" "They said to him, Master," — teacher, — "where dost thou dwell?" Then he said, in the way of gracious invitation, "Come and see."

Behold another of many and frequent instances of the gracious encouragement which is always given —the readiness always manifested, on the part of our gracious Redeemer, to the following, enquiring, seeking sinner. Why did the Saviour turn, as he walked along, and ask that question, "What seek ye?" Was it merely, as we might do, because his notice was attracted? Surely not so. He knew, by Omniscience, who they were,—what was the state of their hearts, and what they were seeking for. He knew that two precious souls, which had been touched by his gracious Spirit, were earnestly following behind him, and pressing after him in the way. And when they expressed their desire to know where he sojourned, (they did not presume to ask permission to come there,) he granted them more than they requested—he said to them, "Come and see." The same gracious exercise of Omniscience in calling and observing

his people we afterwards find him manifesting when he "would go forth, and findeth Philip," and afterwards saith to Nathanael, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee," and when he appeared to the weeping Mary at the sepulchre, who was seeking for him in it, and said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?"

My friends, is not here, then, a gracious encouragement for you, if you are, by the work of his grace within you, sincerely seeking after Jesus—if you know that it is, in godly honesty, your steadfast practice to do so in fervent, private exercise. The Lord, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, knows those exercises. He has seen the internal struggle and the conscientious anxiety. And, if he has not yet manifested himself, soon he will turn and say to you, concerning all the riches of his grace and glory, "Come and see." He will open the treasure-house of his unsearchable riches, and say to you, "Come and see." And though he does not now sojourn upon earth, so that you should go and abide with him as Andrew did, yet he will come and abide with you. He will take your mortal body for his temple. And, at last, he will say to you, even of the house of his unrevealed glory, eternal in the heavens, "Come and see:" "come up hither" and behold my glory. For this is his promise to all that follow him as Andrew and the other disciple did, "If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am there shall also my servant be."

But Andrew and the other disciple "*came and saw where he dwelt and abode with him that day.*" Who does not envy them? What but a spiritual mind is able to conceive the nature of that communion which must have ensued between these disciples and their manifested Redeemer—him who was God over all

things, and yet was at this time veiled in his humanity, so as to hold this familiar intercourse with these his creatures of the dust! What an approach must it have been on the part of the disciples to him whom they had found to be the true Messiah and the God-head sacrifice for sinners! What unburthenings of soul! What desires for heavenly knowledge, for spiritual refreshment! What strong affections of grateful love and reverence for their Lord and Saviour!

Yet have we not, brethren, almost a similar privilege? not indeed to know Christ after the flesh;—(this, too, delightful as it must have been to them,—this is a small thing in comparison of knowing him in the Spirit;—many knew him after the flesh that were none the better but the worse for that knowledge;—“yea,” saith St. Paul, “though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we him no more;”)—but can we not seek him—yea, can we not really and sensibly find him, when we approach with a calm and deliberate mind to his throne of grace—when we go into our closet, and shut our door upon the world, and say, as it were, to ourselves, ‘Come my soul, and let me, at least for a season, seek communion with my Lord?’ Does he not then fulfil his promise, “I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you?” Then he receives our worship, and forgives our sins. And although we behold him not with our bodily eyes, we inherit that compensatory blessing, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

Now after this interview which he had had with the Lord, what did this disciple Andrew do? He “*goeth and findeth his brother, Simon Peter, and he brings him to Jesus.*” Behold in this, brethren, what will always be found to be a strong and decisive mark of having attained to true religion. Grace, when

really received, becomes a diffusive principle. It is a leaven which spreads—a seed which multiplies. It immediately kindles desires that others may partake of it, and share in its precious benefits. It may safely be given as one of the surer marks that a soul is born of God, when it longs for the kingdom of God to be extended,—when it secretly mourns for the sins of the unconverted, and secretly prays, (I say *secretly* prays,—not when there are numbers of beholders to stimulate and excite,) but when it secretly prays for the conversion of the ungodly.

And especially this will be felt, as it was by Andrew, towards those who belong to us by ties of kindred or affinity. Having tasted himself that the Lord was gracious, he thought of his brother Simon Peter, and fetched him also to Jesus. And if, beloved brethren, we have realized by faith the solemn fact of an eternity, and of a judgment to come,—of a heaven of glory, or an eternal suffering, by the resurrection from the dead, can we be careless for the spiritual welfare of those we love—the parent for the children—the wife for the husband—the brother for the sister—or the friend for the friend? Can we think of the fact of their perdition, and interminable suffering in eternal fire, and their everlasting separation with indolent unconcern? It is quite impossible, if we indeed believe it. To be less concerned for this than for their temporal welfare in the present vain and uncertain world argues a state of the most awful infidelity. It must be the daily prayer of every true believer with respect to his kindred, upon the score of even natural affection, that they may be a perfect, unbroken family before the throne of the Lord in heaven.

After this second interview, Peter and Andrew appear to have returned for a season to their needful and lawful calling as fishers on the lake of Gennesa-

reth, not being called as yet by the Lord to a constant attendance upon him. But after a little Jesus came to them again. He entered into one of their ships, preached the Gospel to the people standing on the shore, and then, as an emblem of its purpose, told them to cast their nets. A miraculous draught was taken. And thus he explained to them, and promised them, that he would make them fishers of men. Andrew and Peter and James and John received the command to follow him, and from that time forward, to become fishers of men. And leaving their father, their ships, their nets, and their draught of fishes, at the very moment of success, with all the profit it might have brought them, they followed Jesus. Happy that day and hour to every soul when this determination is made, by the grace of Jehovah and his Spirit working in the heart, not indeed, as it is not necessary now, to forsake our worldly calling, or to make a voluntary sacrifice of all our worldly possessions, but, in the spirit of self-surrender, to acknowledge this present world to be a vain unprofitable thing, full of sorrow and of sin, and to turn with all our heart to the Lord as our portion and exceeding great reward !

I shall make, *in conclusion*, three remarks, with respect to the subsequent history of these disciples, and bearing on the main enquiry we have been pursuing—what is true conversion ?

1. In the *first* place, we notice in the way of *encouragement*, that it is, in its *course*, a *gradual*, and, *at the best upon earth*, an *imperfect thing*. When these eminent disciples had been thus called by their Lord and Master to be his constant attendants and his chosen witnesses, then, we are apt to think, surely they must have been perfected ! Surely they must have enjoyed all that grace could accomplish for them ! But was it so, brethren ? Look at their after-history. One

both tempts and denies his Lord ; so that the Saviour says to him, "Get thee behind me Satan." Another, conspicuous as he was for the spirit of meekness and love, and a third of them with him, would have called down fire from heaven. A fourth of them doubted the power of Christ to feed the multitude with the barley loaves and fishes. And all, at the last, at the time of his crucifixion, it is said, "forsook him and fled." Let us, then, expect infirmities. Let us expect infirmities both in others and ourselves. Let us seek to be perfect, but let us expect to come short of it: let us not be despairing, if we do. The Gospel is given us that we may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. God, in the meanwhile, is the Judge. He can discern between the sinner and his sins. He can discover, even in great offences, whether the heart is right with him. And he can discover, even in small and minute offences, when they mark the character of the wilful unbeliever. The errors and fallings of saints are different wholly from the sins of sinners. The first shall be all forgiven, the last reserved and carefully appointed to the judgment.

2. Notice, however, in the *second* place, that *spiritual conversion is, nevertheless, an actual and total change of character*. Look at the history of these disciples, and behold, in all that is said of them, the peculiar marks, yea, the patterns, of the sanctified and gracious disposition,—the family-likeness of the saints. See their contrite humility ! "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord." See their reliance upon Jesus ! "Lord, teach us to pray." "Lord increase our faith." See their devotedness to his cause and glory ! "We have left all and followed thee." And, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." See their affectionate attachment to the Redeemer. It was one of these disciples, especially,

that "leaned upon Jesus' bosom," and who declares of his own experience, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.—He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." And, brethren, be not satisfied with any thing short of this. Be not satisfied till the natural disposition of pride and selfishness is changed to the disposition of fervent love and of humility. Shrink from that doctrine like a serpent, that any thing else but character,—gracious, and meek, and contrite, and holy character is any satisfactory evidence of spiritual regeneration.

3. *Lastly*, observe, from the instance of these disciples, that the *state of real conversion* is a state that *lasts and continues*. With all their infirmities to let and hinder them, their graces were more enduring: their graces survived their infirmities. And with all true saints there is this increasing encouragement,—that while graces are growing stronger, sins and besetments are simultaneously decaying. All these disciples witnessed a good confession, and suffered or died for the Christian faith. And why did they so continue?—because the strength of the Lord was in them;—because that whom he loveth, he loveth to the end;—because they were kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. One of them once appears to have been in danger, and near—very near to being lost. But the Saviour prayed in his behalf: "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." "Those whom thou hast given me, while I was with them in the world, I have kept. And now, O Father, keep them through thy name." Beginning their Christian pilgrimage together,—called to be Christ's disciples on the self-same day,—and for a long time walking in company,—at last they were severed and scattered to glorify God in the fires;—John to banishment in Patmos,—James to be slain by

Herod,—and Peter to be crucified at Rome. Now they have gone from strength to strength, and every one has appeared before God in Zion. They have entered that house of our God to be made pillars in his temple, to go out no more for ever.

Brethren, let us often remember that exhortation of St. Paul, “ Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” But that we may continue like they did, and like them be faithful unto death, let us do this looking unto Jesus;—looking unto Jesus as the Author and Finisher of our faith. We each of us owe it to our Lord and to his Church, as members together in him, and members one of another, to witness a good confession, and in all the appointments of life and at last of death, as they come to us each in our turn, to be true to him that has called us, and to keep his testimony to the end. And if we would do this, let us remember, that in him our springs, and our succour lie. If he leave us for a moment then we fall. But let us remember that word, “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not—Father, keep through thy own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are one. As thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they all may be one in us.”

SERMON XXX.

DIST. IV. INSTRUMENTAL. SEC. IV.

THE BLIND BEGGAR.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out ; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God ? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him ? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.—John ix. 35—38.

HOW true is that Scripture and how often verified that “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called ; but that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and base things, and things which are despised, yea, things which are not, to bring to nought things that are !*” Our Lord, in a very long and trying disputation which is recorded in the preceding chapter, had been preaching the Gospel of the kingdom to the principal Pharisees, and Scribes, and Jewish rulers. But they were wise in their own conceits. They were proud of their own attainments, and learning, and knowledge. And, therefore, they were filled with the

* 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

enmity of their carnal mind against him. They said of that merciful Saviour who came to seek and to save that which was lost, “Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil.”* And at last “they took up stones to cast at him.”†

The Lord, therefore, left them and departed from among them. And to whom did he go? To whom did he go to refresh and cheer his spirit?—to a man that was blind from his birth, and that sat by the way-side and begged his bread. He found a disciple in him—in one whom the world despised. He performed an act of mercy upon him, and declared to him his salvation. And of so much is he accounted, that here we find upon record one whole chapter out of only twenty-one, which this Gospel of John consists of, devoted to his particular history.

How are the ways of God not as our ways, and his thoughts not as our thoughts! With men, a person is accounted of only for his rank, or his wealth, or his mental endowments, or his personal qualifications. But the test of approval with God is inward character. It is the hidden man of the heart—the assimilation of the character to the spirit and temper of the eternal world. “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” It is the fault and corruption of our nature that we cannot direct our own judgment, because we are so much influenced by circumstances merely external. Nevertheless, all these qualifications are merely earthly. They have nothing to do with heaven, or a suitable meetness for it. They are only matters of time and sense. Has a man wealth and riches? “Naked came he out of his mother’s womb, and naked must he return thither. He brought nothing into the world, and it is certain he can carry nothing out of it.” Has he

* Chap. viii. Ver. 48. † Ib. Ver. 59.

rank and earthly distinctions? "The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all." Has he knowledge, and wisdom, and learning? "Whether there be tongues they shall cease; whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away." But has a man gotten, through the grace and goodness of God, the Spirit of God upon him, the mind and character of heaven—the love of God in his heart?—This never faileth. It is a thing not of flesh but of spirit. It is not a principle of time and of sense, but of eternity. It will last and continue, and flourish and come to perfection, when the world and all that is in it shall have passed away. And whatever be such an one's present condition in life, whatever his outward circumstances of meanness, and poverty, and trial, though like him in our text—a beggar blind from his birth, still, if he be thus adorned with Jehovah's likeness, and endued with his Spirit, he is one of the jewels of Christ, and the crown of life is prepared and appointed for him.

In order to follow out the account that is given us of this poor but faithful disciple, which we here introduce as an instance of the making *affliction* an *instrument for conversion*, we notice three things;—

- I. The *miracle performed on him*,
- II. The *testimony borne by him*,
- III. And the *recompence granted to him*.

I. Let us *first* examine a little into the *miracle performed on him*—the act of mercy and goodness which was bestowed upon him. We are told that "as Jesus passed by, he saw a man that was blind from his birth."^{*} Observe, he was not merely one that had become blind by disease, or age, or accident; for such have been cured by human skill; but blind from his birth. The precious blessing of sight he had never

* Ver. 1.

known nor enjoyed. He was shut up in darkness and perpetual night. The light of the sun—the beautiful face of creation—the forms of his fellow-beings he had never beheld, and could never hope to look upon. And then besides this he was poor. He sat by the side of the road and begged. Unable to help himself, and his parents poor, his only resource as long as he lived was from the alms of the charitable to beg his daily bread. What a notable day, then,—what a happy circumstance for such an one! “Jesus passed by.” He who was full of compassion, and touched with the feeling of man’s infirmities—he who could weep for human sorrow, yea, himself bare that sorrow, came and beheld his case, and took compassion upon him. “Jesus was passing by.”

Let us, who profess to serve and to follow Christ,—let us specially seek for grace to take him as our example. Let us get, by the power of grace, the natural selfishness of our hearts enlarged and expanded, and their natural hardness softened. Thus we shall look not each on our own things but each on the things of others. Thus we shall weep with them that weep. We shall grant to the sorrows of this suffering world which cry to us for help, and especially its spiritual necessities, to find a place in our thoughts. And then we shall make it our study to visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction, and to carry to “those that mourn in Zion the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

It was rather a different spirit from this, which the disciples showed upon this occasion. Instead of being filled with compassion for the blind man before them, and expressing concern for his afflictions, and perhaps commanding him for mercy to the Lord who was passing by him, they began a dry speculation

upon what was the cause of his blindness. "Master," (they say to Christ) "who was it sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* Surely this was what the apostle has called "an unlearned and curious question." How could the man have sinned before he was born! Perhaps they meant to assign it to the fore-knowledge of God, who knew what his sins would be and therefore judged them before the time. Or rather, they wished to ascribe it to the rule of a vain philosophy which was then current among them,—the transmigration of souls;—that a soul might be judged and visited for the sins it had sinned in a former body.

It is a matter of infinite moment for those that will seek after truth, to avoid these nice and curious questions, and rather to look for that which edifies, and ministers grace unto them. This prying into things that are not revealed is but to repeat the sin of Eden—to eat of the tree of knowledge—to covet speculative truth rather than experimental. And there is only one end which the Scripture pronounces can ever come of such questions: "they increase unto more ungodliness." Let us rather desire and aim to seek for those great and essential principles which will make us wise to salvation, and, by faith, and hope, and charity, fit us for the kingdom of God.

Look, then, at the answer of Christ. "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but for this he is blind, that the works of God may be made manifest in him."† Observe, of what large account the meanest person is made when the purpose of God is to him, and the Lord is pleased to use him as an instrument in his hands. A man that lived upon charity—a man whom the world would despise—a man that was born a beggar and blind, and yet born for

* Ver. 2. † Ver. 3.

this very purpose,—to glorify God! that the wonderful works of God might be made manifest in him! that in him a miraculous power might be openly shewn, to assert the divinity and to confound the enemies of the Lord and Saviour! This man, we say, was born blind for this very purpose (the text of Scripture says so) to prove, by an act of Omnipotence in giving him the blessing of sight, that the Lord was the light of the world, and that he was come to that world to work the works of Jehovah:/* that as the man was publicly known to sit by the way-side begging, so he might be publicly seen to have received his vision, and be examined and questioned, rebuked and persecuted, and have the whole nation stirred up respecting him, and by a faithful testimony confess the Lord before them.

And may we not gather from this consideration an answer to that objection, which has been felt by many, that our Lord himself should have appeared upon earth in outward circumstances of such great humility? born in a manger! his parents poor and unnoticed, and, through all his ministry not having where to lay his head! yet “justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory!” The smaller the circumstance of earthly greatness, the greater the power and glory of God! The treasure is placed in the meanest vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of man. And thus, most of his eminent saints, who have shone as lights in the world, have been, by their birth and origin, persons of small reputation. It is better to be even a door-keeper,—a hewer of wood or a drawer of water in the spiritual Church of God,—to be the least in the kingdom of heaven, than to dwell in the courts of princes. The meanest saint upon earth whom the Lord delighteth to honour is greater

* Ver. 4, 5.

and more illustrious than those who are clothed in purple and faring sumptuously every day.

II. Notice now, in the *second* place, the *faithful testimony* which this poor and humble disciple bore in honour of Christ, and the persecution he suffered. He had obeyed the command of Christ to go and wash in the pool, and he came seeing.* He had found by experience that his word was a faithful word. And he had heard him declare that he was the light of the world, and that God had sent him to work the works of God. This much as yet was revealed to him, and this, in spite of all opposition, he boldly testified.

First, “*the neighbours*” were all excited about it. And to them he declared what Christ had done for him: “A man that is called Jesus anointed my eyes and told me to wash in the pool. And I went and washed and received my sight.”† Then they brought him to the *Pharisees*, and he openly told them about it, and that he believed that Christ was a prophet.‡ Then his *parents* were sent for. And they not having his faith and courage, knowing that whosoever confessed that Jesus was the Christ was to be cast out of the synagogue, refused to answer for him, but left him to his fate, and left the consequence upon him: “He is of age,” said they, “let him speak for himself,”§ Then, as a last resource, these envious Pharisees solemnly charged and conjured *him* to “give the praise” of the cure “to God;” but that “as for this man, Jesus, they knew that he is a sinner.” They thought he would take this on their authority as grave and learned doctors, while he by reason of his blindness knew but little of the world around him. But in spite of all they could say to him, and all the terrors that were hanging over him, he boldly and faithfully testified,

* Ver. 7. + Ver. 8—12. ‡ Ver. 13—17. § Ver. 17—23.

"this one thing I know"—this I cannot be deceived in, and your wisdom cannot disprove it to me—"this one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. And if this man were not of God he could not have done this for me." Finding, therefore, that they could not prevail with him, then they stood and "reviled him."* And then "they cast him out."† They cast him out of the synagogue. They pronounced the decree of excommunication upon him—declared him to all his nation as a heathen man and a publican. And thus he had the signal honour put upon him to be amongst the first confessors to Christ in the Gospel dispensation.

III. But let us proceed to notice the *rich reward* which the Lord made haste to give to him. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he gave him, instead of what he had lost and suffered, a far more desirable portion, the saving knowledge of eternal life. "Dost thou believe," said he, "on the Son God?" "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" Jesus revealed to him who he was. "Thou hast both seen him"—he gave thee sight to see him—(the remembrance to him was suitable, if not intentional,)—"and it is he that talketh with thee." The word was spoken with power. It was the word of revelation. The man believed it. He had felt in himself the miraculous power of Jesus. He had "the witness in himself;" and now he believed his word: "Lord, I believe," said he, "And he worshipped him." And thus, when men had despised and reviled him, and cast out his name as evil, then the Saviour loved him. Then he visited him, to comfort him. Then he revealed himself to him. Then he made him his disciple,—savourily joined him to his church and people,—made him a vessel of grace and

* Ver. 23—33. + Ver. 34.

mercy, an heir of glory and eternal life. Let us draw from this subject two or three further reflections.

1. *First*, let it lead us to *contemplate the mighty power of Christ*, as a power *united with infinite grace and goodness*. To open the eyes of a person blind from his birth was surely the act of Omnipotence. None but the power which formed the eye could do it. And it was at the same time, an act of grace and compassion.

And, beloved brethren, may we not look to the Saviour in this great and glorious character—"having all power in heaven and earth," and yet blending that power with infinite pity for the sorrows, the sins, and the sufferings of a fallen, ruined world? When power is given to man, it is often made use of by him to pamper his self-sufficiency, or to oppress his fellow. But with our Lord and Saviour, the power which he possesses is to bless, to save us, and to do us good. It is to comfort those that mourn—to speak very comfortably to Jerusalem—to give eternal life to those whom the Father has given him.

Now then look, we beseech you, brethren, to this Great Redeemer. You have not, perhaps, some bodily ill to bring to him—some temporal boon to ask for. But you have your spiritual necessities. You have the wants of your soul. May you not ask him to open the eyes of your mind? to turn you from darkness to light? to remove the clouds of ignorance and unbelief that surround you? to give you understanding that you may learn his way? And is he not able to do this? He that could open the eyes of the blind, is he not able to teach you the way of God in truth, and to make darkness to be light before you? yes,—this he is able, and this he has promised to accomplish. "Awake," says he, "thou that sleepest,

and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light."

2. Observe, in the *next* place, from this subject, *the blessedness of being faithful*. All the servants of Jesus Christ are required, as part of their service, to confess his name before men. It may be a difficult, but it is a positive duty. It is even described in Scripture as absolutely needful to their being saved ; "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, but with *the mouth confession is made unto salvation*." And, "whoever confesses not Christ before men shall be denied before the angels of God in glory." Consider then, Christian brethren, if you have kept this duty. Have you been bearing a faithful testimony ? In the midst of a wicked world, and all its contempt for true religion, have you not shrunk from confessing the name of Jesus ? Have you admitted to the world that his cross is your glory, and that all your hopes and all your prospects are in him ?

3. And then, if this be the case with you, consider the *love which the Saviour bears you and the tender compassion which he feels towards you*. As soon as he heard of this poor disciple that the Jews had cast him out, and that he was suffering for righteousness' sake, he went and "found him." And observe, that his faithfulness to the light he had was rewarded by clearer manifestation—a more full revelation to his soul ; "I that talk with thee am the Son of God." Then he was able to testify, "Lord, I believe." Then he "worshipped" the Redeemer.

And, dear brethren, if you are faithful—if it is given you to bear a faithful testimony, and to endure temptation, remember that Christ is with you. From his throne in heaven he is looking upon you. He is not an unconcerned spectator when his saints are in

times of trial. He sympathises in what they suffer and he is with them. He was with Daniel in the lion's den, and with his three companions in the burning furnace. He came to Peter in Herod's prison and broke his fetters. He visited Paul and said to him, "Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem so thou must also at Rome."—And when his beloved disciple was banished to work in the mines of Patmos, he came to him and gave him that glorious Revelation, "I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore."

And, dear brethren, as he is with you in the fiery trial, so, if you walk faithfully with him, he will reveal himself to you thereafter,—he will manifest himself to you as he does not to the world. "If any man," says he, "keep my sayings," that is, if he faithfully hold and observe them as the rule of his life and conduct, and if he hold them forth to others as the precious words of eternal truth,—if he walk as I walk, and follow my steps, and adorn my doctrine,—if he honour me before men, and bear a faithful testimony for my name sake,—"if any man keep my sayings, my Father will love him, and I will love him, and I will manifest myself to him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him."

4. Lastly, let it be noted that it is one of the *dignities conferred* by our Lord upon those whom he calls to a saint's confession or a martyr's crown, that by instruments so undeserving he is *reproving the world*, and putting to silence the ignorant cavillings of unbelievers.* Our Lord, on this occasion, made one very solemn declaration of his purpose in coming to the world. He had often said that he came to save it, but here he pronounces, "I am come to it for judgment"—not only for salvation, as it was to this poor

* Ver. 39—41.

disciple, "that they which see not might see,"—but also for judgment, as it was to those Scribes and Pharisees,—as it is moreover to all that are wise in their own esteem against the Gospel of his kingdom, "that they which see might be made blind." The poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind—the weak and the foolish in the world's vain wisdom—the vilest and most iniquitous are turned from darkness to light, and made into chosen vessels, and eminent saints of Jesus, that they may prove to the ages of all eternity that nothing but the wisdom and prudence, the pride, and the greatness and self-dependence of those that reject the Gospel, made it easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for them to have an entrance into the kingdom of God.

SERMON XXXI.

DIST. IV. INSTRUMENTAL. SEC. V.

APOLLOS.

Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.—Acts xviii. part of ver. 26.

THE bringing in of Apollos to the company of believers, and to the work of the Gospel ministry, is an instance of Conversion effected by *private instruction* as the *instrument*. When he made his first public appearance at Ephesus, he was then already endued with excellent gifts. He was “eloquent,—mighty in the Scriptures,—instructed in the way of the Lord,—fervent in spirit,”—a “diligent teacher,”—and a “bold” courageous speaker. Nevertheless, two plain people who lived in that city, a man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla, a couple that feared God and loved his church, were chosen of our Lord as his instruments to “take this man Apollos unto them and expound to him the way of God more perfectly.” It appears they were working people;—by their occupation they were tent-makers;—and Paul had lived at their house and “wrought” with them;—and he had founded a “church at their house;”—and he calls them his “helpers in Christ Jesus;”—and he testified of them

that, in some way or other which is not recorded, they had "laid down their own necks for his life;"—and he says, that "not only himself, but all the churches of the Gentiles," were indebted to them.* These two honoured believers, in private and humble life, were made important instruments in teaching an eminent teacher, as he proved thereafter, of the truth as it is in Jesus. Let none think light of their means and their opportunities of doing good and helping the cause of Christ ; opportunities will always be granted to those who are seeking for them. Let none be willingly tempted, by an indolent, fearful, desponding spirit, to think they have nothing to do, and so to hide their talent in a napkin, or to bury it in the earth, instead of occupying with it until the Lord returns to his kingdom. The means and opportunities granted of being useful in the vineyard will be according to our faith and our fervour in watching for them, and according to our prayer and desire that our Lord would put the honour upon us of using us in his service. A little Israelitish maid was the minister of bodily healing and of spiritual instruction to the great Naaman the Syrian. The public confessions of a beggar that was blind from his birth, and of a woman that was a sinner, and of a dying thief upon the cross, and the Hosannas of the Jewish children, were used by our Lord when on earth to assert his mission and evidence his divinity ; and the faithful diligence of these two humble disciples, Aquila and Priscilla, was the means to the further instruction of a greatly blessed and greatly eminent apostle. God hath chosen the weak, and the base, and the foolish things of this world to confound the great, and the wise, and the mighty:—"even from the mouths of babes and of sucklings he hath ordained strength, that he may still the enemy and avenger." Our little usefulness in the great labour of love is never from want of opportunity, but it comes from

* Rom. xvi. 3, 4, 5. 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

the want of faith, from a selfish indolence, from a want of the love of souls and of desire for their salvation, and from a lack of zeal for the Redeemer's glory.

Now I consider this account of Apollos to be peculiarly valuable as throwing great light upon one important point of Christian experience—upon one great question, rather, touching religious sincerity. I mean that it affords us an example of the extent which a person may reach to in gifts, and even in graces, without being as yet a really enlightened learner in Divine truth, and therefore not being able to be useful in saving others. At the same time, it is not an example of the extent which a person attains to, who afterwards comes short of the kingdom,—(this is a very different matter,—the state of such is not like this state of Apollos,)—but this is an illustration of the previous knowledge and the previous exercise of many before they attain, as they afterwards do attain, to the full apprehending of the mystery of Jesus, and the saving knowledge of Jehovah.

Understand me. Herein is the particular importance which I wish to lay stress upon in this conversion of Apollos. It is an exemplification, not of that near approach which some unconverted persons make to real religion, who, nevertheless, after that period—the period of their nearest approach to it—diverge away from the truth in a backward and downward course, and end in alienation ;—like Herod, or Agrippa, and many others in every age and nation ;—but this is an instance of the kind and degree of knowledge, of spiritual influence, of gifts, and graces, and exertions, which there is in those chosen vessels, who do go on to perfection, who do attain at the last to know the grace of our Lord and Saviour, but who are, *at the time we speak of*, external to true religion,

dark to the mystery of godliness, and, like Apollos's disciples mentioned in the following chapter, having no practical, personal knowledge and experience that there is such a Being as the Holy Ghost.* The difference is very important. It is a matter very closely connected with the comfortable confidence of those who are as yet but seeking after truth; it shows them whether they are those that are in a way of likelihood at last to draw back to perdition, or the just that shall live by their faith and believe to their soul's salvation. Apollos had made his progress—a progress, however, that could not have, so far, proved a saving one;—(in such a state many may be, brethren, of the word's hearers with us;)—but this was peculiar in the progress—this was peculiar in the state and experience of Apollos,—that it did not dissipate like the morning cloud, nor pass away like the early dew; but though in itself as yet not safe nor saving, it was followed by better instruction—it was light made use of visited with light to increase it—it was an instance of the promise “to him that hath shall be given,” and not an instance of the sentence, “from him that hath not shall be taken away even what he seemeth to have.” In short, this degree of attainment, which there was at this time in Apollos, was, as far as it went, of the right description. It was a certain degree of advancement to be retained upon the right road, and not a distance of departure to be retraced upon the wrong one. It was the scaffolding to the spiritual building, and it stood on a good foundation. It was the door by which he finally entered to the temple of truth and salvation. This is the case, then, which we have to present to you, and the use we propose to make of it. In order to which, consider *three* points;—

* Chap. xix, ver. 1, 2.

- I. *First, as a test of experience, the kind and degree of his attainment;*
- II. *Secondly, as a ground of reliance, the matter and means of his furtherance;*
- III. *Thirdly, as a prospect of consequence, the fruit and value of his labours.*

May the same Lord over all discover his way to us also perfectly, that we may know him, and labour in his kingdom, not only in the baptism of water to repentance, but baptized with the unction of the Holy Ghost !

I. We notice, then, in the first place the *kind* and the *degree of Apollos's qualifications* for the character he was assuming, and the work he was undertaking, when he first came to Ephesus. For this is the first mention of him : he "came to Ephesus." He was "born at Alexandria," a great city in Egypt, and he came to Ephesus a city in Asia Minor. Where he had gotten his knowledge such as it was, or how he had gotten it, or what brought him to preach, or who sent him out as a preacher, or what it was that he preached except that it was John's doctrine, we cannot tell. At all events, it appears from the 27th verse, that he was not yet received and sent by the apostles or the Church of Christian believers. Many there are, alas ! that stand for preachers now, with about as sufficient credentials, yea much less satisfactory. They have not the powers of Apollos,—his gift of utterance, nor his knowledge of the Scriptures, nor his earnest desire to be useful--his simple purpose to be doing good : rather they preach themselves and not Christ Jesus the Lord ;—they have no mind to hear from a regular, qualified priesthood, however great be their ignorance, that so they might learn the way of God more perfectly.

Well, but what (we return to the question) were Apollos's qualifications? You shall notice that there were in him, at this period,

- 1. *Three very valuable gifts*, and
- 2. *Three very eminent graces*.

1. *First*, it is to be noted, there were in this notable disputant *three very valuable gifts*.

(1.) First of all there was the *gift of utterance*. He was, it is said, "an eloquent man." The word in the original* bears two meanings. It either means that he was what we call an *orator*, and eloquent in that sense—in his language and stile of speaking; or else that he was what we call a great *logician*, and eloquent in that sense—in his judgment and depth of argument. Perhaps, for ought we can tell, he was both of these together. At all events, he was an eloquent man, and both these attainments are parts of that gift of utterance.

And, brethren, this we shall say; that the pride of these very things in those who have them, and the praise of them in those who are hearers, is the bane of the Gospel, and the poison of preaching in the present day. There is either the pride and the praise of an able, eloquent speech; or else there is the pride and the praise, with some of a higher stamp, of judgment, and singular wisdom, and extraordinary spiritual discernment. They are gifts, indeed, of great price when under a gracious keeping and a humble management; yea, they are talents to be answered for when the Lord shall reckon with his servants; but of this we are sure, they are, in this age of ours of creature-worship and itching ears, the well-spring of abound-

* λογιός.

ing iniquity, and, as a curse to the pride which they foster, the cause of all the schisms, and heresies, and novelties, and perversions which distinguish the present generation.

Not, however, to dwell separately on each of the points which are mentioned in the previous state of Apollos, which our time would not admit of, he had, in addition to this gift of utterance as a man "eloquent," (2.) the *gift of the "word of knowledge"*—he was "mighty in the Scriptures,"—(3.) and the *gift of the "word of wisdom"**—he was "instructed in the way of the Lord." Moreover, these *three* operations of the measure of grace which he then had, seem to have been in lively and notable exercise: (4.) he was "fervent in spirit"—that is, very earnestly desirous and his heart burning within him that the truth might be glorified ;—(5.) he was also "diligent" in outward activity—it was not an inward wishing without a corresponding exertion—he "spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord:"—(6.) and he was, besides this, ready to suffer persecution for the truth's sake—"he began to speak boldly" even in the Jewish "synagogue." There was the grace of *zeal*, the grace of *labour*, and the grace of *patience*.

Now, brethren, we do not mean to say that these particular points of character do, in themselves, establish either that Apollos was, or that any one else is, a seeker not to be confounded, a workman not to be ashamed. We speak not just of the gifts themselves, but of the manner, and spirit, and degree in which any possess them. There are many that have such points of privilege only to witness against them and finally increase their condemnation. There are some, however, like Apollos, in whom there is evidently found a sort of divine peculiarity, which marks their character

* 1 Cor. xii. 8.

to be the Lord's own forming, and their gifts and their graces to be his efficacious bestowing, and their works and their labours and their perseverance to be under his own direction. As to the mere possession of such things, many there are who are eloquent to a proverb ;—they can “ speak with the tongues of men ?”—this is a small thing—they can speak “ with the tongues of angels,”—and yet what are they ?—“ a sounding brass —a tinkling cymbal.” Many there are, that are great and mighty in the Scriptures ;—they can quote—can explain—can apply—and can enforce them ;—the dark and infidel Jew in the present day can do this,—he can quote you the Scripture and bring it forth to his argument from Genesis on to Malachi,—he can give you the word at his fingers' ends, and wear it on the hem of his vest, and write it broad on his phylactery :—and yet to such persons the Scriptures are nothing worth as it matters their own subjugation to them. Many there are, moreover, that are “ instructed in the way ” evangelical ;—they have a Gospel creed, and know the truth as it is in Jesus ; and all the doctrines of grace are revealed to their understanding ;—there is nothing more to be told them, while life continues, concerning Divine Revelation, but they know it already :—nevertheless, it is a knowledge that puffeth them up, or a knowledge without enjoyment—they know the will but they do it not. And more than all this, there may be a fervour of spirit which is merely natural and animal ; there may be a “ diligence ” for others which at the same time is self-neglecting, that a man shall be keeping his neighbours' vineyards but neglecting his own ;—a man shall be saying, like Jehu, to those whose opinion is worth enjoying, as Jehonadab's was to Jehu, ‘ Behold my zeal for the Lord ;’ whereas, all the while, they resemble Jehu in this also, that “ they turn them not from their evil way :” it is a sore evil this, and especially to be noted in one very numerous body, (the name is need-

less,—the character points them out) who are chiefly remarked for their proselytism of the poorer classes. Finally, there may be a “boldness” to risk persecution ;—yea, as it often is, a presumptuous, boasting forwardness to seek it ; especially in days like the present, when nothing is really suffered, but when the persecution itself is the very thing that such carnal professors wish for, that it may exalt them from nothing, and bring their names into notice, and feed and gratify their own vain-glorious disposition. Such are not suffering for righteousness’ sake, neither is their’s persecution ; but it is the result of their own presumption, and the fruit of their own folly.

Believe it, brethren, this character which we have drawn is not an uncommon reality—it is not without reason that we warn you against such delusion. Such persons abound wherever the Gospel comes. They are like the counterfeit coin which mixes along with the current,—they are the mould and the rottenness in the joists of the spiritual building ;—the false-hearted followers are they within the citadel, worse than the enemy without it. And more they are doing to hinder the work of God, and to bring rebuke upon religion, and to make it disgusting in the eyes of men, than all the iniquities of open transgressors together.

Apollos, however, was not such an one as these. There was something peculiar—something different in him, which made his experience to be that of those who go on to perfection, and contrary to the experience of those who draw back to perdition. What then was there in Apollos which marks the state that is *yet imperfect and insufficient* to be at the same time a state of *promise for further benefit*? This is the main question.

Take the account, then, which is given of the manner in which Apollos exercised his gifts, and you shall find three marks by which to distinguish a state of *real progress* towards salvation from a state of *false resemblance* to it. There was, in this disciple,

- [1.] *Sincerity*, and
- [2.] *Fidelity*, and
- [3.] *Humility*.

[1.] It is very evident to all that are taught of the Spirit, that the account here given of Apollos is meant to imply that as far as he knew he was quite *sincere*. The state of his own heart—of his own interior is opened up to us, when it is said by him who knoweth all things, that he was “*fervent in spirit* ;”—not merely fervent in zeal external, or fervent by animal excitement,—but in the state of his own heart, in the working of his own spirit within him, he was sincerely fervent. And that he was so inwardly, was evinced by his outward conversation. He had deeply studied the Scriptures—a labour, depend upon it, which no self-deceivers ever sit them down to. He had attended to the Baptist’s doctrine, and had received it as God’s truth, believing in Jesus, so far, as the Lamb of God. He had been baptized for repentance, and preached repentance to others, though he knew not the baptism yet of the Holy Ghost. And having these measures of grace and knowledge, he was sincere in using them in God’s service. Using those rays of heavenly light which had broken in upon his darkness, in the light of the Lord he saw light, and found it increasing upon him. Occupying with what he had, the promise was visited upon him, “*to him that hath shall more be given, and he shall have more abundantly*.”

[2.] Then there was also in Apollos a *fidelity of*

constancy—an *entireness* of purpose. He was not only sincere in his profession, but determined and hearty in his adherence. He taught therefore “diligently.” It was not a bustling, boasting, noisy, troublesome preciseness, but a steady, constantly laborious, fervent, diligent activity. And although persecution was then at its utmost against that way, especially from the Jews, yet into their very synagogue he went, and there spake boldly the things concerning Jesus. Those we were speaking of, who court persecution now, know that they have nothing to suffer ; then, it was a different matter ;—excommunication, poverty, torture, death ! Those who are now so contentious for it, if such were again the case, would be of the foremost to hide them from it.

[3.] Lastly, there was, in Apollos, *real humility*. Two of the Lord’s poor plain disciples, Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who came, as it happened, and heard him speak in the synagogue, “took,” it is said, this Apollos “unto them, and expounded to him the word of the Lord more perfectly.” And then this gifted, talented individual, and afterwards eminent apostle, sits at the feet of these two lowly teachers, and learns the doctrine of Jesus and of the Holy Ghost. Possessed as he was of great and eminent gifts, an eloquent speaker, and a scriptural divine, and now, it would seem, looked up to by the Ephesians as a great and popular teacher, yet he makes no objection whatever to let this humble couple, themselves but just converted, instruct him further in the truth, and expound to him the way of the Lord more perfectly. Here, we contend, was very great humility. And this we will say, brethren,—wherever you meet with any who, in this day of profession, thrust their religion unseemly before the people, make large pretensions to perfected sanctification, or put forth singular public efforts to further the cause of truth, then

try the spirits by this—try them by their *humility*. Are they followers of him who was meek and lowly? Is the mind in them which was in Christ?

Depend upon this with assurance, that if with our light and our knowledge of the testimony of Jesus we are humble, sincere, and faithfully, diligently holding onward, then all is well with us—we shall maintain our way, and sooner or later know that way more perfectly. But depend upon this with assurance, that whatever we know of the truth or the Lord's way, however we may seem to be religious, yet if there wants *sincerity*—if there is in the life and practice any allowed *unfaithfulness* or treacherous dealing with God—more than all, if there wants *humility*,—all we have gotten will not continue, but dissipate and come to an end like the shadow that vanisheth away. The changes of life will drive it from the remembrance; the pleasures of life will rival it from the affections; the duties of life will exclude it from the attention: and, at last, the cares and the sorrows of life will be as the waves and the floods to drown it and the winds to carry it away.

II. But in this matter of the interview between this disciple Apollos and Aquila and Priscilla, we have before us the *second* point we were to notice—viz. the *matter* and the *means of his furtherance*; and that, as a *ground of reliance* for all who are such as we have been describing. Whatever they also need, as Apollos needed, of further knowledge and instruction, our God shall reveal even this unto them—our God shall supply to them all their need from his riches in glory by Jesus Christ. He shall find them an interpreter, as he found for his servant Apollos these two Corinthian converts. He had only, as yet, understood the baptism of John. He therefore stood but, as it were, upon the threshold of the Church of the Redeemer.

Aquila and Priscilla informed and discipled him in the baptism of Jesus,—the baptism of power “with fire and with the Spirit :” they were used as the instruments to lead him onward, from being a mere external and elementary disciple, to be an inwardly spiritual and Pentecostal believer.

All I shall advance upon this, shall be a *word of warning*. It is, indeed, a ground of encouragement for the meanest of the Lord’s labourers to work with hope in his vineyard, while it also illustrates to us one great practical principle of the plan of God’s work by the Gospel,—that he uses for the most part mean and unlikely and feeble instruments, as far as man is concerned in it, to carry that work forward. It seems his particular pleasure to place the treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may not pertain to the creature. Yea, what is preaching itself? what a poor affair at the best except for the power of God attending it!—he uses the “foolishness of preaching.”

Rather, brethren, however, we would set this matter before you in the way of *warning*. It is a matter of experience that there is much less need to stimulate those that have knowledge in sacred things to be wisely trading with their talent, (they know their encouragements to this which stand in the Holy Volume)—there is far less need of this than there is to restrain and repress the over-forward from stepping out of their proper place and circumstance, and making themselves busy unseemly with what they have no concern in. There are too many would-be Aquilas, and too many would-be Priscillas in the present generation. Their minister does not, perhaps, exactly please them. From various reasons that might be mentioned their minds are prejudiced against him. He has not the qualifications of some that may have

preceded him. Or his views are too legal, and not like theirs' were, built upon the system of God's inevitable purpose, and so giving comfortable quarter to atheistical indifference. His walk is too strict, and his spirit too serious and cautious; not easy and lax, undisciplined and irregular. But, the worst of all his offences, he does not, for his part, see it to be his duty, to sit at the feet of these self-constituted judges, to flatter their vanity and to pamper their spiritual pride. Rather, his visits are rejected, because they are visits of serious duty, to tell such persons of their self-delusion. Now then, says such an one, 'I am a "father in Christ"—I am "a mother in Israel;"—this preaching is not the Gospel—it is all of it "youthful lusts," raw inexperience, and mistaken doctrine: people are looking to us to give them our opinion of the preacher and what he preaches: we shall tell them of him that he is a tinkling cymbal—(no matter at all that the Lord has sent him among us)—we shall tell them of all that he preaches—(no matter how those people are thus prejudiced, and their eternal salvation hindered by what we say to them)—we shall tell them of all that they hear from that pulpit, before which, by a gracious Providence, they are sitting from Sabbath to Sabbath as, otherwise, profitting hearers—we shall tell them of all that they hear therefrom that it is not the Gospel of Christ:—it is a deal too legal and practical—it is the doctrine of the Arians—it denies the divinity of Jesus, and the person and work of the Holy Ghost.' Ah! but, brethren, there is in all this, in these sort of sermon-hearers, who come to the church to sit in judgment on the preacher, and at the best to hear for others around them, (themselves reigning as kings, rich and increased, and needing nothing, and wise in their own conceits,)—there is in all this the pride of the bottomless pit—sin that will have to be answered for at the judgment-seat of the Redeemer. Such were not Aquila and Priscilla,

St. Paul's two Corinthian converts. There may, indeed, be many an Apollos, and undoubtedly there is,—those, I mean, who are teachers needing and seeking for further teaching for themselves. All the Lord's faithful servants will readily account themselves to be so. But it is not in the proud, demure, self-elevated hearer we shall find an Aquila or his wife Priscilla.

III. It just remains that we notice, after this interview with these two disciples, Apollos's subsequent usefulness. It remains that we notice, as we said, as a *prospect of consequence*, the *fruit and value of his labours*. Wishing to pass into Achaia, the brethren at Ephesus wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him;" and when he came he helped them much which *had* believed through grace; and he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ." Two thoughts, arising from this statement, shall close this discourse:

1. Observe, in the first place, that *those of the servants of Christ who have great natural gifts and mental powers are often proven and tried with difficulty in getting to simple truth, and are longer delayed in seeking it, in order that, when at the last they attain to it, they may be made more eminently useful in the Redeemer's kingdom.* It is graciously used as a means to guard them from vain-glory. Humbled and bruised in spirit by the long delay of their enlightenment, and by the difficulty of believing, then they are prepared for a further boon of revelation, and are made, by the grace superadded, a source of peculiar blessing to the church of Christian believers. All this learning and eloquent speaking of Apollos was fruitless and unavailing, until he had received, by the means of these two disciples, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the simple knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. But when this had taken place in him, then those gifts

were sanctified and made of service to religion. His knowledge of the Scriptures was used by the Lord and Saviour to establish his Messiahship to the Jews that were unbelieving. Then he “ mightily convinced” them. And even those other disciples, who had through grace believed by the preaching of Paul, were helped much by Apollos. The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge that was in him were made to help and to edify, and to lead them on to perfection. Herein, by the way, we have a very notable coincidence between this book and St. Paul’s Epistles. It is in his Epistle to these same Corinthians that we find that apostle testifying “ Paul may plant, and Apollos water”—Paul may convert through grace and Apollos “ help much” to those who have been converted:—“ God alone giveth the increase.”

2. Finally observe, from this narrative, the *active co-operation of Divine Providence with Divine grace, displayed in the government of the Christian Church.* St. Paul had just been at Corinth, and had brought from thence to Ephesus Aquila and Priscilla, who met this disciple Apollos, and were the means of confirming him in the truth as it is in Jesus. Apollos then goes to Corinth, and builds up, and edifies, and greatly helps to, those whom St. Paul had there been instructing; while St. Paul, in the meanwhile, finds at Ephesus those disciples of Apollos who only knew, all that he was able to teach them, the baptism and doctrine of John; and to them he imparts, by his apostolic office, the gift of the Spirit of Jehovah. What shall we say to these things? Jesus Christ, our Lord, is verily walking in the midst of his Church of believers—walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and guiding the movements of the stars of the churches by his own right hand. The Holy Spirit has undertaken to guide, and to teach, and to sanctify all the redeemed:—and verily all the Triune Jehovah,

in planning and achieving the saving of all believers, are making the wisdom and power of God to meet in one manifold exercise,—the working of grace combined with the movements of Providence—one great magnificent machinery, the wheels within the wheels,—that in the conducting of sons and daughters into glory, mercy and truth may meet together, and grace and wisdom may embrace each other.

SERMON XXXII.

DIST. IV. INSTRUMENTAL. SEC. VI.

PHILIPPIAN JAILOR.

And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes ; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.—Acts xvi. 32—34.

THERE is one remarkable contrariety in individual experience with regard to attaining to true religion. We find it set forth in Scripture, and we see it exemplified in life around us, that while there are many who are ever seeking and “ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,”—some also, moreover, who are long and with difficulty seeking before they do come to that knowledge,—there are others, on the contrary, who are brought to that knowledge by an acting of sovereign grace without ever seeking for it; the language of the prophet Isaiah may be taken up respecting them, “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not; I said to them, Behold me, behold me.” While it is written that “every one that seeketh findeth,” it is also written, that “many shall seek

to enter in and shall not be able :" while it is declared by Jehovah concerning mankind, that he " will be enquired of by them to do" redemption "for them," yet we find him, in the accomplishment of his own eternal purposes, striking one down to the earth in the very midst of his journey to persecute his believers, converting him in a moment from a fierce opposing adversary, to receive an apostolic commission for building the Church he had been resisting :— we find our Lord, upon the cross, by an act of immediate and unsolicited mercy, changing the revilings of the dying malefactor to the language of prayer and penitence : and here, in the narrative now before us, we behold this Philippian jailor, who had only that night exceeded the strictness of his office by casting two eminent evangelists into the inner prison and making their feet fast in the stocks, in the course of that very night, before another sun had risen upon his history, falling down at their feet, anointing their stripes and bruises, enquiring the way to be saved, and hearing the word of the Lord preached to him and to his family. The accepted time was come to him. The period was fully arrived for the purpose of God to be accomplished concerning him and his, which had been from the world's foundation. In the dark of that night the day-spring from on high—the light of eternity dawned upon him ; and the sun which had set upon him, doubtless, as a Pagan idolater and a child of wrath even as others, found him, at its rising, changed to a Christian believer—an heir of eternal glory, " rejoicing in God with all his house."

To those who are taught of the Spirit there is, however, nothing perplexing in this apparent contrariety in God's dealing with sinners. They know that he knows the heart. They have confidence in him, as his children, that he is the " Judge of all the earth and will do all things right :"—" thou, most upright,

dost weigh the path of the upright." They feel that the clay in the hands of the potter has no authority to question the will of him that forms it. And while they wait for the light of a better world to make that clear hereafter which now they are thankful that they know in part, they can write upon the page of their difficulties here this one sentence, as amply sufficient for all of them such as they are, "O the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

This, however, brethren, we may just remark by the way;—that you shall find the most eminent of God's saints—the most useful and faithful of all the servants of the Lord and Saviour—to be those who have passed through one or other of these two sorts of experience. They have either been greatly exercised in long, and earnest, and difficult seeking after truth, like as we were speaking of Apollos, before they were finally established and settled and grounded in it; or else, like the apostle to the Gentiles, or like this jailor of Philippi,* they are those that have suddenly, in the midst of all their waywardness, received the message of mercy,—“believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.”

Now then, this conversion of the keeper of the prison at Philippi comes before us in this point of view. It is an instance of the using of *sanctified Providential circumstance* by the Living Head of the Church, as the *instrument* which he selected, and which he does sometimes select, to turn the sinner's

* We have not, indeed, any notice of his subsequent history, but, at least, it is evident that the event of his conversion, and that of his house, was important, in that so much suffering on the part of the apostles was accounted worth while to effect it. As soon as the morning was come the magistrates sent to let them go.

heart. And I shall endeavour to make two uses of the passage ;

I. *First*, to lay it down to us that it is a *matter of fact and experience, that the Lord does make this use of remarkable Providential events to work the conversion of unbelievers;*

II. *But secondly*, that there is *need of abundant caution that men are not trusting to such things happening, as a plea for their present indolence, and for continuing to live in a state of unconversion.*

I. We have *first* to take up the position that *it sometimes pleases God to make use of remarkable particular Providential events in the converting of unbelievers.* And applying this principle to the case of this keeper of the prison, there will be two or three points of notice to connect with it.

1. In the *first* place, it is to be noted that when it thus pleases God to interrupt the course of a sinner, it is, for the most part, perhaps we might say always, when the state of that sinner is a *state of particular resistance and daring rebellion against him, and the interruption overtakes him in the midst and the height of his opposition.* Paul and Silas had come to Philippi to preach the Gospel. The rage of the people was excited against them. The people brought them to the magistrates. The magistrates tore off their clothes from their backs, and commanded the Roman lictors to beat them with rods. After receiving, it is said, "*many stripes,*" (for this infliction of scourging was so severe that in the Jewish law no one was allowed to have more than forty stripes save one ; but here, by the Roman law, they were sorely beaten with many,) they were cast by the magistrates into the town prison, and the jailor was charged to "*keep them safely.*" Then it is that we read, that he "*thrust*

them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."

It is quite evident that he herein exceeded the necessary strictness of his office. The magistrates had put them already into the prison, and only charged him to keep them safely, but he, for his part, thrusts them into the inner dungeon of the prison, and there, moreover, makes their feet fast in the stocks. Neither, again, did he even wash their stripes, or give them any thing to eat, as he afterwards did, immediately when the change by grace had taken place in him. He evidently seems to have treated them with special severity: and if we may judge from the first enquiry he made of them after he came to himself—“what must I do to be saved?” we may fairly suppose that he knew their character and office,—that he had heard of the crime, as the people counted it, for which they were placed in that prison;—viz. that they had cast out an unclean devil, and a cry had gone through the city for “many days,” “These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show us the way of salvation.”* The complaint that was made against them was their showing the way of *salvation*, and the entreaty of the jailor, when the Lord brought him to repentance,—was “what must I do to be *saved*?” There is ground, therefore, enough to suppose that the particular harshness with which he treated them arose from opposition to their principles, and from dislike to their holy character. At all events, he dealt with them hardly, as his subsequent making amends admitted.

Now then, this was that critical period at which that Lord and Saviour, whose disciples he was injuring, interrupted his rebellion, and visited him in compassion to pluck him as a brand from the burning. The

* Ver. 17, 18.

hour of midnight had arrived. The jailor was sleeping ; but Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises, and the other prisoners hearing them. There came in a moment a great earthquake ;—the foundations of the prison were shaken ; the doors were all burst open ; and the chains and fetters of every one in the prison were loosed or broken. This was the matter which, as we shall see presently, effected this man's conversion.

2. Again : this account here given us of this keeper of the prison also illustrates to us that such particular acts of remarkable Providential conversion of unbelievers are often *just at the period of the fulness of their iniquity*. But for the voice of Paul and his timely counsel, in another moment this offender had committed an act of suicide, and plunged himself into eternity. The keeper starting from his sleep saw that the doors were open, drew his sword, and seems to have been in the act to take away his life. Then the first word of the truth—of the counsel of God—was spoken to him, when Paul with a loud voice cried to him “Do thyself no harm.” The guilt of that self-destruction, in the purpose and intention, was already incurred upon him. But just at that moment, when his guilt had reached to the full, he was snatched from the jaws of perdition ; he was seized as it were, by the right hand of the Redeemer, to be kept and preserved as an after inhabitant of heaven, just when he stood on the verge of, and when he was in the act of casting himself down, the eternal precipice to the bottomless pit of hell. Then the first sound of the Gospel came to him, “Do thyself no harm.”

3. Notice, however, *thirdly*, that these particular instances of special grace to sinners, in remarkable Providential visitations, are *also accompanied with a large putting forth of the Divine power to make those*

visitations effectual. There is some interpreter present, as a messenger of God, to sanctify the occurrence by the word of God and by prayer, and then there is found the fruit of it. Events in themselves are nothing. However marvellous and striking, yet without an unction from above to make them blessings,—without a power from above to attend them, they only harden the heart. What would all this remarkable occurrence have done for this heathen jailor by its own efficacy? We need not be doubtful what would have been its consequence—the narrative informs us ;—with his own hand he would have committed suicide—his sword was drawn that he might fall upon it. But Paul and his fellow-prisoner had been praying in the prison,—praying no doubt, as the suffering saints then did, by their Lord's commandment and example, for “those that persecuted and despitefully used them :”—praying that this affliction might be to the glory of God, and issue, as all their afflictions did, in some fresh testimony to the truth and power of the Gospel :—Paul and Silas had been praying,—and Paul at the critical moment spoke the word as the Lord's interpreter ;—(*the whole that he said we know not ; it is likely a good deal of converse passed between them ; for, you are to observe, it was not till after he had brought them out that the jailor asked them, “what must I do to be saved?” but this is recorded as the first commencement of Paul's discourse to him)* “do thyself no harm.” And thus the event was consecrated by the word of God and by prayer. They both of them “spoke to him the word of the Lord and to all that were in his house.” Those words of the jailor, “what must I do to be saved ?” people ignorantly fancy were all the enquiry he made; whereas, they are doubtless written just as a sample of his anxiety. Those words of apostolic reply to it —“believe on the Lord and thou shalt be saved”—are frequently spoken of as if they were all that a Chris-

tian man had to care for ;—‘ just simply submit thy belief to the doctrine of Christ that is preached to thee,—a thing to be done in a moment, easy enough for every one to comply with,—and then no fear but thou shalt be saved ;’—whereas, this is plainly nothing more than a sample of much that was preached that night of solid, important, practical, sanctifying truth, to effect that keeper’s conversion.

He had, then, it is plain, a messenger of God to plead for the Lord with him in this Providential occurrence. And now, we say, mark the sufficiency—mark the effectual working—of the power of God which attended it. Behold it in the change which it wrought—in the fruits and effects it produced in him. He who by the nature of his calling was doubtless rendered (at least, so his conduct had proved him) of a hard and reckless spirit, now begins to “ tremble.” He who had left his prisoners to shift as they could for themselves in a dark dungeon, now “ asks for a light” to come to them. The man who had treated them, like the rest of his people, as the offscouring of all things, “ springs in” to them in an instant, and “ falls down before them.” The rigid jailor, who had stretched the orders that were given him to the utmost rigour of severity, begins to minister unto them: from the innermost prison he brings them even “ into his house ;” their “ many stripes,” which had been without any binding up to heal them, no doubt bleeding in the prison, and covered, perhaps, with its loathsomeness, he now “ washes” and anoints for them; “ their feet,” which he had hurt “ in the stocks,” now he “ falls down” to embrace in an act of humiliation ; and whereas, in the midst of their suffering, he had not even given them support for their bodily sustenance, having brought them into his house he “ sets meat before them.” There he became a hearer to the word which they preached to him ; there

"he was baptized, he and all his" family ; there, it is said, "believing in God he rejoiced with all his house," or, as the word may probably mean, he "rejoiced *all through the house*"—he went from room to room rejoicing.

Now we say that all this, brethren, is still, upon occasions, the way in which the Most High Jehovah deals with ungodly sinners. He still displays his compassions, and the exceeding riches of his grace, in some particular instances of *Providential interruptions*, by breaking the heart of stone in *the midst of its greatest resistance*,—by striking the conscience and arresting the course of the sinner *at the summit of his iniquity*, putting forth the right-hand of the Lord to save him when actually falling headlong over the pit of hell ;—and by *causing his gracious unction and Omnipotent power to attend* the event which is happening, to *interpret* its meaning to the heart, to accomplish a change of character, to bring forth the *fruits of contrition and newness of life* in those to whom it is occurring.

II. In bringing all this, then, to the *second* use we have contemplated—its practical application,—it is needful to mix the encouragement which such a view of the Divine benignity affords us with *principles of necessary caution*,—caution, I mean against *unwarranted presumption*.

1. *First*, let us offer a *caution against presuming expectations*. There are not a few persons amongst all kinds of hearers who are in this very dangerous condition,—they are looking for something wonderful —something, yea, supernatural and out of the common course, as the means which Almighty God shall use to accomplish their conversion: yes, they have made up their mind that this will one day occur to them ;

and that, for the present season, they shall fold their hands together, take their fill of sin, and close their eyes in the slumbers of infidelity. And, brethren, what have we to say to this? Why that they are looking for that which will certainly never happen: they are staking their future salvation, and resting their happiness for all eternity, upon a contingency never to be verified, upon a chance which is sure to be a blank in the lottery of human existence. The great mistake and delusion of all such persons consists in this,—they forget that their resolution is an affair of wilfulness—yes, a decision of wilful sin. Wherever God interferes in some wonderful manner to save by an acting of Providence, it is where the mind is ignorant, where the light of the Gospel has never shined. But those that have heard the truth,—yea, more than this, brethren, those that have felt its testimony in the conscience, but, because that the carnal heart dislikes it, will not yield to its claims upon them, but are asking a sign from heaven,—such are assuredly guilty of wilful sin;—life and death are before them, and, with their eyes wide open, they choose to go down to the gates of hell. “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign”—(there was the secret of the sign’s refusal; it was not a generation of humble seekers, wishing their faith to be strengthened—“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief;”—but an evil and adulterous generation, desiring still to be unbelieving that they might live on in sin—) “an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and no sign shall be given them but that of the prophet Jonas.” And to all such sin-loving haters of God’s truth now, no sign shall now be given but the sign of that sign’s antitype—that Jesus suffered and rose again. Herod looked for a miracle, but the Saviour “answered him not a word.” Pilate challenged him if he were the Son of God, but all the answer was,—“thou hast said it.” The Jews, at the crucifixion,

declared their promise—"if he come down from the cross we will believe him,"—but all that was spoken was—"it is finished." And so will it be assuredly with every single individual of those we are now describing: they will look for a sign and a wonder, and die without receiving it. Life will be drawing to its close—the wonder will not have happened—hope deferred will make the heart sick—and the little spark which they had of reverence for religion will be quenched at last in the ocean of a dark and desolate eternity.

2. A *second necessary caution* which we derive from this history, shall be against a *presumptuous dependence*. As it is vain to expect these wonders and signs—these marvellous things to happen, so is it vain to rely on any efficacy in them, if it should please God to send them. Supposing the sign or the wonder came, has it any power in itself to convert or sanctify? Has it any virtue efficacious to change or to curb man's turbulent, selfish, proud, rebellious nature? Brethren, none whatever. It may please God to send along with it his grace to turn the heart, as he did in the case of the jailor,—but this he can do without it. In the use of the ordinary means, in answer to prayer, and in the means of his preached word, he is found of those that seek him, and every one that asks receiveth. There have, as we have said, been instances of conversion, where a marvel has been the instrument. An awful accident, or a singular preservation, or a curious coincidence, has been the means to effect it. One blasphemer has been saved by a dreadful shipwreck,* or another has been struck by a bolt of thunder;† and never again has their mouth been opened except in reverence and

* The case, it will be remembered, with the son of a late celebrated clergyman.

† An instance occurred in the writer's own parish.

godly fear. Some, perhaps, have had sent them a dream and vision of the night;* the glory of heaven has been unfolded, or the pains of eternal fire. And some of this number have turned from that time to the Lord, and humbly walked in his testimonies. But why is it so? Was it the circumstance itself that turned them? Surely not. What then was it? It was the power that accompanied—it was the grace and Spirit of Jehovah. And this, brethren, you cannot deny, would have been sufficient without it: yea, it is always sufficient. It is constantly offered before you. It is that which we urge you to close in with continually. It is always fresh to you, always ready, and always new. To turn the heart to God, and to bring it to a cordial acceptance of the Gospel and grace of Jesus, nothing is sufficient but God himself: yea, we speak it with reverence, that mighty work is divided between the whole Three Persons of the One Omnipotent Jehovah. If all the other powers and principalities of heaven could unite with the powers of darkness, and work by the children of men, their might would be infinite weakness in turning one sinner to God. All the motives, moreover, that can be urged or thought of are utter vanity without the power. We may allure by the prospect of heavenly glory, or alarm by the terrors of eternal suffering;—we may work upon the reason by pleading the curse and the wretchedness of unconversion, compared with the beauty of holiness, the comfort of being redeemed, the joy and the peace of believing;—we may urge thus the reason by argument, or the conscience by remonstrance;—or the feelings by means of excitement;—but all will end in disappointment without the power of Jehovah: it will be like talking to the dead, or shooting an arrow at a brazen wall. Put all these things together, and set them into the balance, and they shall be as light as the dust upon it, compared

* Ibid.

to one single supplication made by the individual himself—“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

3. In the *third* place, there comes from this narrative *a caution against presumptuous forgetfulness*. May we not appeal to many among our hearers, if there have not really taken place with you, in your past history, some of these very Providential happenings of which we speak? But, as to any lasting effect of them, already the fact is you have clean forgotten them. You have had your escapes from accident. You have had your marvellous coincidences testifying for God. You have had your signal and almost miraculous warnings. You have had your messages from yonder world, as plainly spoken to your conscience as if you had heard the voice of an angel. Warnings, entreaties, mercies, and interpositions have crowded around your path, and still you are unconverted. Every fresh year it may be said of you, as it rolls away into eternity, “the harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and you are not saved.” And when shall it be to you, brethren, that the charm of your iniquity shall burst—that the bubble of the world shall be broken, and set you free into the liberty of the Redeemer? O look back, at length, with some little softening of heart, and some little tenderness of gratitude, upon the dealings of God’s long-suffering, and say at the last of it all, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!” “Forget not all his benefits—the Lord to thee is kind.” “He healeth all thy diseases, and forgiveth all thine iniquities.” And what shall you render to the Lord for all his benefits? This you shall render, brethren,—and render it we earnestly pray you—“receive the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.”

Yes, brethren, make your beginning to call upon

the name of the Lord. All other means will be ineffectual. If heaven itself could be opened, and your eyes could behold its glory, and see our Lord upon his throne ; and if your ears could listen to the praises of the thousand times ten thousand by which that throne is surrounded ;—if the spirits of the damned that have died accursed could come and tell you of their torments,—this would not—could not convert you. You would still go on in your slumber, till death at last overtook you, and plunged you down to hell. One only means there is which can ever prove efficacious ; and that, because it is a means that moves the might of Omnipotence. What is that means ? It is that for which we have pleaded—that you call upon the name of the Lord. Begin earnestly to pray, brethren. If heaven is worth your gaining, begin to pray. If hell is worth your escaping, begin to pray. If the world is not worth your loving, begin to pray. And if you pray, you shall repent. And if you pray, you shall believe. And if you pray, you shall be certain. And if you pray, you shall be saved.

SERMON XXXIII.

DIST. IV. INSTRUMENTAL. SEC. VII.

CORNELIUS.

Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.—Acts x. part of ver 4.

THERE is one very numerous class of Scripture statements, which many persons who have embraced evangelical views of truth seem to feel difficulty in receiving. They are the statements which plainly assert that the Most High will deal with mankind, even under the Gospel and a dispensation of grace, strictly and exactly according to their real character. “ Except your righteousness,” said the Lord to his own disciples, “ shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.” “ We must all,” says St. Paul, “ appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” “ Behold, I come quickly,” says Christ to all his Church, in closing the canon of Scripture, “ and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” And so says an angel of God, in the words of our text, even to one who was hitherto a stranger to the Gospel—to the centurion Cornelius

—“thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God ;” and St. Peter, when convinced of the reality thereof, confesses, in the 34th verse,—“of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons ; but, in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” These, I say, are statements which some who are disciples to the doctrines of grace are not able to receive. They feel exactly the prejudice which the chapter records to have been in the mind of Peter ; they are ready to say with him—“not so, Lord,”—even to a plain declaration of his own Word, or to think it, as he did, “a thing unlawful for a man that is a Jew”—a man who is brought by the Divine benignity within the covenant of redemption—to extend the bonds of that covenant—to open the door of mercy —to those who are hitherto strangers to that covenant’s virtue, albeit they be diligent, fervent, upright seekers after God and his truth and righteousness.

Now, certainly, to a man that does exercise serious thinking, and with an upright heart, respecting revealed truth, there is no comfort whatever in acting the part which many such persons act with respect to such statements of Scripture. Having formed their own views and systems respecting the truth of Revelation, they either unfairly explain away every passage which seems to interfere with their scheme, or else they wilfully shut their eyes to it, and will not consider it at all. We say, without hesitation, that to an upright seeker there is no comfort in this ;—there is nothing comes of it but a secret conviction that the Word has been treated unfairly. Depend upon it that all who are real disciples, and under the Spirit’s teaching, will rather say of Revelation, and of all its statements, without reserve,—“thy word is tried to the uttermost ; therefore thy servant loveth it.” They will take it in its length and its breadth,—

its promises, its precepts, its descriptions, and its revelations, and will say of it all, ‘ Speak it, Lord, for thy servant heareth : that which I know not, teach thou me : teach it me here in part, that when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part may be done away.’

Now this, then, is the position which we purpose to take up at this opportunity,—the difficulty we propose to examine :—how is it reconciled that while the Scripture, as we rightly teach, represents *salvation, and all that accompanies salvation, to be all of grace,* yet that here, in this chapter, it is declared that “*in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him ;*”—that while Revelation declares, though not perhaps in so many words, yet in its general bearing, that *means, in themselves, are nothing*,—that *efforts are not meritorious*,—that *prayer is imperfect*,—and that *alms and works, at their best, are channels of sin*, yet here it is said to this ignorant Roman centurion,—“*thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God ?*” For this account of Cornelius we have now to present as an example of a sinner attaining to Conversion through the *instrumentality of the accepted use of the common and ordinary means.* He was a man unenlightened, but he was one that feared God ;—in that fear he had trained “all his house ;”—he was a just man” and a man “of good report ;”—he “gave much alms to the people ;”—he “fasted”—and he “prayed”—he “prayed to God alway :” and how did these exercises terminate? An interpreter was provided, fetched on purpose miraculously, to instruct him—the light of eternal truth broke in upon his spiritual darkness—one of the inhabitants of the world of glory, in his “bright and shining” clothing, stood before him—the word of the Gospel was preached to him—the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and upon all that heard

it—and he and those that were with him were baptized in the name of the Lord.” Let us attempt two things :

I. To clear and explain what is hard and difficult ;

II. To use and apply what is plain and evident :—

That is, first, to find a scriptural answer to that which needs to be reconciled ; and, then, to make a scriptural use of that which remains established.

I. Our first endeavour must be to meet and explain the difficulty :—how does it happen that while salvation is to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, yet that here, and elsewhere, it is declared to us that “every one that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him ?” There are three considerations that must be taken account of, and then this Gordian knot shall be untied for us.

1. In the first place :—a large portion of this difficulty is at once removed by considering—that the acceptance here spoken of with God is not merely a moral but a religious acceptance. St. Peter does not say that in every nation those who “work righteousness” only, are accepted with God ; but he says,—those who “fear God and work righteousness” are accepted with him. Cornelius is not merely spoken of as a just man, and a charitable man, who gave much alms to the people, but as a man who practised religious exercises. All his uprightness, and moral strictness, and good deeds are placed upon this foundation—that “he feared God with all his house.” Here, therefore, is an answer at once to one very false, though frequent, opinion we meet with, that, amidst the uncertainties of religious creed and belief, those who have lived uprightly, in the practice of virtue,

and moral goodness, and benevolence, will have a chance to find it tolerable for them in the day of judgment.

Not only do persons, at their dying hour, continually tell us,—yea, in nine cases out of ten,—‘we have done no ill to our neighbour—we owe no man any thing—we have acted justly, and, in our measure, have practised mercy and benevolence—we hope we shall find acceptance ;’—but, besides this, we venture to say, that this is exactly the view which the large majority of thinking persons have embraced to live by ;—they thus pacify their conscience ; and although, at the same time, the world is dominant in their affections, and self is the end which they live for, and they live without God in the world, yet they hope it shall be well with them in the world to come.

Brethren,—is there any difference between religion and morality ? Let us come to the point—let us meet the question :—has the Most High a law provided for his creatures, and a right and title to prescribe it to them ? If he has,—and who will venture to deny it,—then what is that law ? Has it not two tables ? Do not its first four enactments relate to our duty to God, as well as the latter six to the duty we owe to our neighbour ? Does not the Lord and Saviour so explain it and sum it up ?—“thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, thy soul, thy mind, thy strength : this is the first and the great commandment ; and the second is like unto it,—thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” The first of these is religion—the second is morality—the two together are Christianity. And woe be to him who shall make a separation between them ! ‘What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.’ Go to the bar of God with nothing but religious belief—lacking a personal

righteousness,—and there thou shalt find thyself proven a self-deceiver,—a whitened sepulchre—a painted wall. But go to that bar of judgment with nothing but moral virtue, such as it is accounted, too, in this fallen, blinded world, and there thou shalt find that thou hast missed the main duty of life—the remembrance of thy Creator;—there thou shalt stand with the throng that shall reap that sentence,—“shall be turned into hell all the people that forget their God.” Let no man trust, then, to “working righteousness,” except it proceed from the other principle mentioned,—“fearing God.”

2. Let us now proceed a step further. The acceptance here spoken of—“in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him”—is *not a meritorious* but a *merciful acceptance*. Put the two tables of the law together;—combine in one character religion and morality—“fearing God and working righteousness;”—and still it is not a deserving but a gracious—not a meritorious, but a merciful acceptance. How do we infer this from what is said of Cornelius? We infer it from this, brethren;—Cornelius *prayed*;—“he prayed to God,” it is said, “always.” All that was given him of grace, and afterwards of glory, was not awarded as the fruit of his merit, but given as answer to his prayer. He was engaged in “praying at the ninth hour” when the “man in bright clothing came and stood before him.” His prayer, perhaps long persevered in, had ascended up as a remembrance before that throne of the Eternal, whose attribute is that it is a throne of grace.

We admit, indeed, that it is easy for those who are not taught of the Spirit to draw a very ignorant conclusion from this circumstance. They may magnify prayer as a service, as if it were merit in the creature; instead of considering it as a means, which

lays hold upon the grace of the Deity. They may think that Cornelius was a holy, exemplary person, performing his devotions, (as such people call it,) with a worthy strictness and decorum ; and that therefore he was visited and answered. But all this delusion arises from ignorance of what prayer is. There is the point, brethren,—what is prayer? Prayer is not performing a work by which God is benefited. Prayer is not doing God service. The act of praying is not a tribute or a tythe paid to the Almighty, like a man would pay taxes to the king that governs him. A monstrous delusion this, brethren, and yet a very frequent and common one ! But what is prayer then ? It is a needy, and guilty, and penitent, contrite sinner exercising his privilege—asking to have from the Divine benevolence, and not presenting as an offering an exertion of self-denial or a compliment of acknowledgment to appease the Divine wrath. It is an ignorant creature asking for light and knowledge—a creature sinful pleading for free forgiveness—a creature helpless and needy imploring strength for his weakness, humility for his pride, love for his selfishness, holiness for his uncleanness, faith for his unbelieving, and grace to help him in every time of need. For this, undoubtedly, Cornelius “prayed,” and “prayed to God alway :” and while he was praying, the messenger came from the world of glory—the “man in bright clothing stood before him.”

3. And then, *thirdly*, we have to consider—that this acceptance of Cornelius—this acceptance of which St. Peter spoke,—was *not a finished and justifying*, but a *beginning and admitting acceptance*. It was not that acceptance which is predicated of the redeemed, that they are “accepted in the Beloved, for the forgiveness of sins ;”* but it was an acceptance of admission to learn that way of forgiveness, to enquire

* Eph. i. 6, 7.

successfully and obtain the knowledge of that Beloved. It was accepting him to be a learner in the school of Christ, and not, as yet, accepting him in Christ as a saved and justified believer. It was accepting his prayer that God would send him an interpreter—that the Lord would find him a teacher,—that his ignorance might be instructed—that he might know the way of salvation. In short, this was the acceptance ;—“Cornelius, thy prayer is heard—therefore send to Joppa : Cornelius, thy prayer is come up before the throne,—therefore send for one Simon Peter :”—‘ thy wish to be taught is accepted, and this is the answer I bring thee ;—send for my servant Peter, my apostle and interpreter—“ he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”’

Here, then, finally, is an answer to that opinion,—that whatever religion men hold, if they are only sincere in it, it shall save them. Here is what justifies the Scripture, that “no other name is given under heaven whereby we must be saved but only the name of Jesus.” Here is a defence for the Article of our Church,—“they also are to be held accursed that presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature.” Cornelius had not, as yet, the knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus. He was not even a Jew. He was a Gentile Roman, but had turned from the Pagan idolatries to pray to the True God.* He was not, therefore, saved. Had he died in that state he would not have had salvation. All his praying, all his fervour and sincerity would not have done that for him. But his prayer was accepted :—ac-

* We might, indeed, further argue that even his prayer was accepted because it was the prayer of faith. For St. Peter, at the 37th verse, speaking of the “preaching of peace by Jesus Christ,” says to Cornelius and his company,—“that word ye know.”

cepted for what?—accepted for admission into the knowledge of the Gospel, that he might be enlightened and instructed. His prayer went up to the One-True-God. An angel of light came down from the world of glory. The angel introduced an apostle, and the apostle preached Jesus. He told him of “peace by Jesus Christ.”* He told him the doctrine of “the Holy Ghost and of power.”† He told him of deliverance from “the Devil”—of Emmanuel, “God with Christ.” He told him of Christ’s death and resurrection.‡ He told him of his coming to judgment, —and, in the mean time while life and opportunity are given, of the witness of prophets and apostles that “whosoever should believe in him should receive remission of sins.”|| And while the apostle was speaking, the Holy Ghost fell upon them, and Cornelius and his company were admitted to the number of saved and justified believers.

II. Having thus removed and explained the difficulty which seems to connect with this narrative, it now remains, in the second place, that we *use and apply the important truth which remains established*. Let us ask the simple question—what does this narrative teach us? It teaches us, brethren, the *gracious readiness which there is in the Divine mind to do three things for the praying, enquiring sinner*—for him who is thus, as Cornelius was, “fearing God and working righteousness.” It shows us the gracious readiness of Jehovah

1. To hear such,
2. To teach them, and
3. To admit them into his Church.

1. *First*, let such be assured of the *Divine ready-*

* Ver. 36.

+ Ver. 38.

‡ Ver. 39, 40.

|| Ver. 41—43.

ness to hear them. Cornelius's prayer, it is said in the 31st verse, was "had in remembrance in the sight of God." That, too, is the meaning of the word "memorial" in the text. The Most High God not only hearkened and heard it, but he formed it into a "memorial,"—he had it "in remembrance" before him.

Let those who feel they are yet strangers to the real beauty of the truth, and dark to the mystery of the Gospel, ask of their own experience if they are praying as prayed this centurion Cornelius. He "prayed to God alway." He was "praying at the ninth hour," —at three o'clock, that is, in the afternoon;—while others were busily engaged in the cares and bustle of life, then he fasted and prayed. Shutting his eyes upon the world, he lifted them up in solemn prayer and meditation to the great, invisible Jehovah. Then the heaven was opened, and one of its ministering spirits came to minister unto him as an heir of everlasting salvation. Brethren, suffer us to ask you,—have you adopted this method? have you, in godly honesty, given it a fair trial? Have you thus prayed to the Living God, with your whole heart, that you might know the truth,—that you might be able to turn to him,—that you might be able to repent—be able to believe—be able to conquer your besetments, and to live for his kingdom and glory? Depend upon it, if you will not think it worth while to make this sacrifice of time and effort,—if you will not make use of the test of truth which you have in your own possession, viz. to try the faithfulness of Jehovah's recorded promises,—you will never be able to believe,—a mist of thick darkness will be always covering your journey —you will miss your way through the world's wilderness, and certainly never enter to see the King in his beauty into the promised land. But if you will only pray, in the full and right sense of the word, then

God shall assuredly hear you. You may be kept waiting for a season to prove and try you. But your prayer shall not be forgotten. It shall be a memorial in heaven. It shall be had in remembrance before the Lord.

2. Observe, in the *second* place, the *Divine readiness to teach and enlighten* those that are truly seeking God. Here was a man of a Heathen country—of the Pagan Roman empire ;—no means of grace for him to go to!—no prophet or righteous man to speak to him a word in season!—the very best religionists around him were the dark, Pharisaical Jews who had not received the Gospel. From them, however, he had learned to believe in One Living Deity, and to turn from dumb idols of stocks and stones. He prayed to that Living Deity. And that was a saving means to him. That was sufficient—the Lord undertook the rest. And mark how much was done, and how much was set in motion, to bring instruction to this disciple. An angel comes to him from heaven, and directs him to send for Peter. A vision is three times sent to Peter to prepare him for the duty before him. The Spirit spake to Peter and told him to go with the messengers. And the angel had warned Cornelius that this apostle “should teach him all that he ought to do.”

Is there not encouragement in this to those who are ready to yield to a feeling of distrustfulness lest the truth as it is in Jesus should never be fully and comfortably manifested to them as it is to the company of true believers? There are many that are ready to despond upon this particular point, and to say, ‘We shall never understand it,—never believe it with a simple faith,—never affectionately, simply, and cordially embrace it.’ Here, then, there is for such a plain example to direct them. Do as Cornelius did.

You believe in a Living Deity. Pray to him with simplicity. Pray to him with perseverance. Offer some such supplication,—“Lord, open thou mine eyes. Lord, I believe;—help thou mine unbelief. O hide not thou thy commandment from me, for I am a stranger upon earth as all my fathers were.” And, brethren, depend upon this, you shall not offer that prayer for nothing. God shall find you an interpreter,—shall send you a manifestation. Objections shall soon vanish and difficulties die. The crooked shall soon be straight to you and the rough places plain to you. And this shall soon be your experience—that “he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.”

3. Finally, derive from this narrative this encouragement also,—that our Lord is very ready, yea, without any unwillingness, to *admit* the enquiring soul that is seeking after him *within the pale of his Church*. “While Peter was preaching the word, the Holy Ghost came down upon all that heard it.” “Upon the Gentiles also was poured out that gift” and promise of the Father. And then his authorized apostle “commanded them all to be baptized,” and admitted as members into Christian fellowship.

Certainly this we know, brethren, that into two very different ranks and companies mankind around us are divided. There is the Church and the flock of the Redeemer, but it is the Church in the wilderness,—the flock in the midst of the desert. The ungodly know not their secret, nor understand their enjoyments, nor feed on their hidden manna. But there are some that we meet with, who would fain have admission to be joined to their number, to be led to their living pastures, and to be kept in the same fold. But they are full of fears for their own infirmities. They think they can never be brought so near as such

are,—never have that unction of the Holy One,—never approach with acceptance to a near communion with Jehovah, to walk in the light with his children, to sit at his table, to partake of his sacraments, and to rejoice in his manifested presence. They think if peradventure they attempted it, the Lord and Saviour would reject them, and cast them out.

But would he refuse to admit them? Would he be unwilling at all to join them to his redeemed ones? Surely not so. Whatever was wanting to make them fitter, he would complete it in them. And as he did to Cornelius and his Gentile company, he would pour out upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost,—and no man should forbid but that they should be admitted, by a mystical, spiritual baptism, into the Church of the Redeemer.

O let us therefore say to any such of our hearers,—delay not, we pray you brethren, to go to our Heavenly Shepherd, and to “knock” at the door of the fold, that it may be opened unto you. “Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” But within are patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles,—all the excellent of the earth—a holy and blessed company, who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, and have his Father’s name upon their foreheads. We would use to each of you, brethren, in a spiritual signification, the invitation of Laban to Eliezer, “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, why standest thou without?” Why should you think, beloved, that others are welcome, but that you may not have that privilege? Put it to the trial, and discover that verily the Lord is gracious. Come forth out of Babylon before its hour is come, and enter the spiritual Jerusalem—the Church and fold of the Redeemer. Of that it shall soon be verified, that the

sound of rejoicing, or craft, or merchandise shall be found no more at all in her, and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in her;—of this it shall soon be accomplished, that the song of their triumph shall go up for ever and ever,—that they need not the candles nor the light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light and the Lamb is the light thereof.

SERMON XXXIV.

DIST. V. CHARACTERISTIC. CONCLUSION.

PETER AND JOHN.*

Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.—John xxi. 20—22.

AMIDST the benefits which arise from looking at example in religion there are likewise some practical evils. Persons are too much swayed by comparisons. They are needlessly depressed, or unsafely elevated, by comparing their experience too much with the experience of others. If they can sanction their own low standard of holy living by an example which, especially and eminently, ought to be their directory, they are insecurely contented; forgetting that the value of the proof depends always on the trueness of the test. Whereas, if a brother or a sister in Christ seem to pass them by on their journey, and to advance very far before them towards the goal of Christian

* These characters are again introduced, not to repeat their biography, but to illustrate a general subject by one incident in their history.

perfection—if the graces of others appear to be more matured, and their character more completed, and their confidence more established—if their faith appears to be stronger, their hope more steadfast, their love more fervent,—then many a diffident believer, who has learned in the school of Christ to think meanly of that which is for good in himself, and largely of that which is evil, shall be depressed and dissatisfied at the view of his own short-comings. But often, we say, he shall be thus disquieted needlessly. And why do we so judge?—for various reasons. We say that such are needlessly discouraged, because the whole natural character and turn of mind in those other disciples is of a totally different description:—their graces, as they appear to be, are frequently in a great degree, the parts and features of the natural disposition,—their meekness is natural simplicity, their devotion is natural seriousness, their faith is natural credulity. We say again that such discouragement is needless,—because many of those elevated disciples, who are viewed with such emulation, are not in the sight of God what they are in the sight of their fellow;—we do not know the heart, and this is not all the evil—they do not know it either;—all is not gold that glisters,—the humble, contrite worshipper, who walks with God softly and safely in the valley of humiliation, has a better portion to trust to than those who are high upon the mountain, exposed to all the storms of temptation, the blasts of Satanic assault, the gaze of the world below them, and the dangerous precipices of self-delusion. And again we affirm that this depression is needless,—because it may be the Lord's good pleasure that some of his chosen generation should receive more largely of his fulness than what he has appointed unto others,—or else it may be his will, that some particular grace may be conspicuous in one, some grace of an equal value distinguish the spirit of another. “To each of

us grace is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ;" and this will be the feeling of every real disciple—"I am thankful to be, though but as a hewer of wood, or drawer of water, in Jehovah's tabernacle! I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the palaces of ungodliness." "He that wrought effectually in Peter," says St. Paul, for one purpose, "the same was mighty in me" for another. "Lord,"—said Peter, in the text, "seeing another disciple following,—Lord, and what of this man—what shall he do? Jesus saith to him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me."

Seeing, therefore, brethren, that there is, and is to be, this diversity of character, this is evident—that the great, essential duty for every separate person who wishes to seek the Lord is, instead of comparing with others, to make religion and all its exercises an individual matter—a matter of personal enquiry, of separate personal application. In closing, therefore, by this discourse, the course of Sermons on Conversion which has occupied us for a long time past, and taking up the consideration of our *fifth* leading distinction in that great and important work—a *distinction characteristic*—a distinction in the subsequent character of the disciples of Jesus after they have become converted—I shall just endeavour to enforce this one principle—that, amongst the multitude of real but distant, and of doubtful, and of defective followers of Jesus around us, there is only one safe course for us, and that is to make religion a separate personal affair with us;—to take the Scripture only, and with prayer for Divine teaching, apply it to our own heart, and to our own experience;—to use the question, and obey the suggestion of St. Paul, "Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God;"—to avoid those comparisons with others which the

Lord interdicted when he said—"what is that to thee?" and to obey the direction which he added to it—"follow thou me."

There can be no doubt to any reasonable person, but that the main business of life for every one of us is to take care of this point,—that we do lay hold of the hope set before us and the grace given us in the Gospel before we come to a dying hour. But the question now before us is—how we are to conduct ourselves *in the Church* of our Lord, as *members mutually together* in him, and every one members one of another; so that while, on the one hand, we make a profitable use of the communion of saints, we may not make an abuse of it, on the other, to hinder and interrupt us in running the race that is set before us. These *two* points, therefore, I shall attempt to take up and examine in this discourse,—

I. The *abuses which may be made of* the mutual position in which believers are placed as fellow-pilgrims and sojourners, and

II. The *uses which it may be applied to.*

I. Consider we, first, *the abuses*. I shall mention *four* of them, and all partaking of *one* character, viz. that by looking too much at man in this matter, this effect is produced upon such persons' religion,—there is in it a *resting in the creature, instead of looking upward to the creature's God* :—"Lord, and what shall this man do? What is that to thee?" said Jesus,—"follow thou me."

1. In the *first* place, the religion of such, who look too much at their fellow-sinners, and too little at their Lord and Saviour,—who are ready to ask concerning every one but themselves, "Lord, and what of this man?"—their religion becomes a *religion of*

custom—a religion of *creature-conformity and not of Divine influence*. We believe this to be the state of a large proportion of the younger part of those who are counted Christians in the present generation—those who are members of Christian families, and trained for life and its after duties under religious discipline. They are taught from their earliest childhood the principles of the Gospel; but they learn them from man's teaching—from flesh and blood—and not from the Lord revealing his secrets to them. They are acted upon by example, which is used to influence their will,—they are told to look at such an one, or to listen to such another, or to imitate such another; but it is man's example—it is an influence drawn from the creature, and not from the creature's God. They are told to form certain habits,—to spend such a time in prayer, in reading, or in self-examination; but it is a human restriction—a law of bondage on the conscience; and the motive and the power to keep it is only derived through the creature,—it is not a sense of privilege which comes from the love of Christ constraining. And then they are taught to perform certain outward works,—to join religious societies, to visit the widows and the fatherless, to deluge the country with religious tracts, to further the interests of Sunday schools, and other such labours of charity, of which it is easily forgotten that all their reality of value depends upon the motive from which they originate. “A cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple shall not lose its reward;” but of “many wonderful works” it shall be said at last to the doers,—“ye are workers of iniquity.”

Now all this is the religion of custom—the religion of creature-conformity put in the place of Divine influence. The instruction—the example—the restriction—the outward diligence—are all gotten

from the creature and not from God. The operation of the mind is “Lord, and what of such an one?” And instead of following the Saviour, the course adopted is to follow them. After a season these disciples, such as they are, enter upon the duties of life—its personal settlements, cares, and responsibilities. Then a large part of their number cast off their earlier restrictions, and according as the change in their circumstance partakes of a worldly character, religion dies in their bosom, and their end is worse than their beginning ;—they become completely carnal, and end their history as unbelievers. The rest of that number, who still adhere to their first customs, yet do it as a matter of duty,—perhaps, even worse, as a part of the pomp of their station, (an awful position, indeed, to stand in with a view to a final judgment !) there is in it no love to the Redeemer ;—they have “a name to live while they are dead—a form without the power of godliness.”

2. A second abuse of the mutual position of believers in the Lord’s Church, by looking too much at the creature in the matter of practical religion, is that this effect is produced by it—that it makes such persons’ religion to be a *religion of comparison*—a religion of *creature-guidance and not of Divine direction*. The rule of standard and attainment—the measure possible to be attained to of grace and gracious influence is taken from the experiences of others, and not from the statements of the Bible ;—“Lord, and what of this man?” ‘would that we had his faith, his love to God, his meekness, his wisdom, or his sincerity !’ —or, “Lord, and what of such an one?” ‘he is an eminent example,—and yet, there is such an infirmity,—there is this particular spot on his saintly garment,—there is this or that imperfection,—may we not gain encouragement?’ But hear the answer of Jesus to all such fleshly reasonings—to all such carnal curios-

ity ;—“ Lord, and what of this man ?” Jesus said to him,—“ what is that to thee ?” only be careful of this one business—“ follow thou me.”

Depend upon it, brethren, that in the matter of religion no man is a rule for another. Comparison will never do any thing but buoy up the spirit of the man that needs to be abased, or else give needless torment to the humble, penitent believer. Comparison with the creature, and making the creature’s experience our guide in the way to heaven, is only putting an affront upon the Divine directory. The Bible only is the sure guide. Study that word of truth, and there you shall find what a Christian ought to be. There you shall find what grace is able to do for you, —how it can conquer your besetments, remove your hindrances, convert your inclinations, warm your affections, sanctify your nature, and thoroughly change your heart. There you shall find, too, allowance for the utmost of your feebleness, sympathy with you from Christ himself in your conflict, promises to spare you in forbearance, not breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoking flax, and promises to help you in all your struggles, making his grace sufficient for you, and your strength equal to your day. And then, brethren, depend upon this, that the gracious character which the Lord himself shall form in you shall be essentially different from the common exhibition of religion now in the world. Its grace shall be more manifest ; its knowledge more experimental, its enjoyments more real, its confidence more established, its private exercises much more fervent, its public exertions more in the spirit of Christ, and its daily victory over sin, and trial, and temptation, more complete and satisfactory.

3. *Thirdly.* There is also a frequent *misuse* of the mutual position of believers as pilgrims and so-

journers together—drawing the heart to the creature rather than to God—that it makes the religion of many to be a *religion of impulse—a religion of creature-interest and not of Divine motive.* Persons, I mean, are moved and stimulated to perseverance by the influence of public exercises, and their feelings are warmed, and their desires renewed from time to time in them, by the stir and the bustle of public means, rather than by a serious and real personal consideration of their own danger and their own necessity: they are stirred up to endeavour by what is happening to others rather than by the dispensations and dealings of God toward themselves;—“Lord, and what of such an one?” ‘this person is awakened—that person is converted:—such an one, surely, was a great and grievous sinner—see how the Lord has called him! such an one has passed through a most remarkable experience—see how wonderfully the Lord works with his people! or, such a determined and wilful enemy to religion has been cut down in a moment by the Divine displeasure—see how the Lord is a God of judgment! or, mark how the hand of the Lord is spread abroad in the pestilence to visit in the day of his wrath, for the provokings of the ungodly! call the people together and make the most of the opportunity.’ Many, we say, are thus affected for a season—but, after a little, they are colder and darker than they were before. Again the rebuke of our Lord may be spoken, concerning all this sort of circumstance, to every one of his people,—“what is that to thee?” “suppose ye that those Galileans whom Pilate slew were sinners more than all Galileans, or that those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell were sinners more than all at Jerusalem? I tell you nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.” The command of our Lord to every one of his disciples is still a personal, separate, individual direction,—“follow thou me.”

Most unhealthy, brethren, is the spiritual state of those who can never feel in religion except when they are with others,—who can never pray with any fervour except when others pray with them,—who rob the minutes of private exercise in the closet to add them to the hours of public worship in the congregation. Such individuals do not at all understand what it is to have communion with God. They have no solemn and serious interviews, no quiet, recollected intercourse, no secret soul-transactions with the Father of spirits, that they might live before him. Their's is the bustle of public interest—the motive of creature affections ;—it is not the personal approach, in the sacred hour of retirement, to the presence-chamber of the Deity. Their religion results from, and depends upon, their connexions—or it rests on their attachment to some particular teacher—or it is fed by the course of society in which it places them in life; their habits are formed in its exercises, or their interests served by its profession :—take away the cause which supports it, and all their service of religion falls at once to the ground. O let such be reminded, that “no man can ever redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him ; he must let that alone for ever.” Let such be reminded, that no fellow-disciple of Jesus, as the Papists vainly talk, can spare of the oil of his lamp to trim their expiring flame when the Judge approaches. Let such, moreover, be reminded, that no man can die for another, or stand for another before the great tribunal. Then, at the last, they must learn to stand alone—to transact with God alone—to pray, and to seek, for themselves alone. To die is a solitary thing ;—and those who have not before then had their secret approaches to the Deity will find that the loneliness of dying is more than they are able to bear. Yes, they must die alone. The piety, be it what it may, of their nearest and dearest connexions cannot stand them in stead

at that hour. They must die alone, and be buried, and separately rise from their hiding-place to stand, each for themselves, at our Lord's tribunal, when the trump of the archangel shall awake the dead.

4. *Lastly*, on this point ; the *wrong view* which is taken of the mutual position of Christians leads those who take it to the creature instead of to the Lord by its having this effect on them,—that it makes their religion a *religion of mere business*—a religion of *creature-occupation and not of Divine operation*. They are busy, and active, and forward to spread the truth—to publish the knowledge of the Gospel—to awaken the careless—to convert the ungodly. But all their doing is man's work. Human selfishness and human exhibition is in it. It is not of Divine operation—it is not the zeal of the house of the Lord eating them up as it did their Master—it is not the principle working in them of “faith that worketh by love :”—“Lord, and what of this man ?” ‘let him be called to know thee—let him be brought to repentance—let many begin to enquire,— and let thy grace convert them !’ But—thou, who sayest such things, to this all the while thou art blinded,—thyself hast need to be converted. Thou needest the Lord's rebuke to Simon,—“what is all that to thee ?” thou needest to study the Lord's direction—“follow thou me.”

II. Having now set forth the *abuses* of the mutual position of believers, which abound in the Church at this time, let us just *secondly*, consider *its right and Scriptural uses*.

1. In the *first* place, the Scripture points out to us the *use of a certain degree of imitation*. I say a certain degree—and what is that ? “Be ye followers of us,” says St. Paul, “even as we also are of Christ.” ‘Just as far as we follow him, do ye tread in our foot-

steps.' And again he says, with respect to all the saints that have lived and died in faith,—“seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race that is set before us.” But how does he say we are to do this?—in this way—“looking unto Jesus;”—“looking unto Jesus as the Author and Finisher of our faith.” In this way it is, brethren, and in this spirit, that we are to be “followers of them who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises;”—“looking to Christ as our pattern for the way and as our strength to travel it.

And in this there is encouragement—in this there is something to animate our endeavours, and to quicken our lingering, slumbering footsteps in the journey we are taking to eternity. All that have ever been wise, or excellent, or faithful, since the world had its beginning, have walked, in every successive generation, in the same way. The way is a sanctified, consecrated way, by those that have journeyed in it, and by the end to which it has conducted them. Jesus Christ is the great “Forerunner”—the “First-Begotten from the dead;” and all the redeemed have followed him in the way, with songs and joy everlasting upon their heads. They have passed through the valley of Baca—the rain of Jehovah’s Spirit has filled the pools of his grace for every one of them—they have gone thus from strength to strength till every one has appeared before God in Zion.

Who would not wish to have part in the same journey, and attain to the same termination? Heaven has been the great garner into which the Lord’s wheat, out of every age, has been gathered, while the chaff has been cast away. All the excellent of the earth, whose place here is no more found, have been gradually added to the spirits of the just made per-

fect. “Without are dogs, and sorcerers, whoremongers, idolaters, and murderers, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.” And this, we know, will be the end of each of our course—that “he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall, of the Spirit, reap life everlasting.”

2. *Secondly*, our mutual position, as believers together in the same covenant, should be made this Scriptural use of—the use of *a wise, and a Scriptural communion*. ‘I believe,’ says our Creed, ‘in the communion of saints ;’—what is that, brethren ? A passage or two shall describe it. First, its *sympathy* ;—“whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.” Then its *charity* ;—“they had all things common, and parted their possessions to every man, as every man had need.” Then its *unitedness* ;—“that there should be no schism in the body ; but that the members should have the same care one for another.” And then its *mutual service* ;—“provoke one another to love and to good works ;—let your conversation be to the use of edifying to minister grace unto the hearers ;—and comfort one another with such and such words.” This is the communion of saints. We say, in the Creed, that we believe in it, and yet, to look at this generation, we might almost say that we do not. Alas ! there is little enough of it now to be found in the world. The Church that should be the Saviour’s beautiful garment, woven without a seam from the top to the bottom, is rent to pieces with sects, and schisms, and divisions. The mark of evidence is clean put out from the world by which it was appointed by Christ that all men should know his disciples, viz. that “they love one another ;” and by which the world might have a chance to “believe that the Father had sent the Son.” That was

the light which should shine for our Lord among us, but the Devil, by schisms, and sects, and heresies has put his extinguisher upon it. And this we are sure of—that never will the days of final blessedness arrive to us—the days of the Church's millennial glory—till the members of Christ are again united together—till we can say, as in the ancient time, that there is “one body, and one Spirit, and one faith, and one baptism, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.” Brethren, pray for that time to come to us.

3. *Lastly*, therefore, there is to be made of our mutual position together *this use* also—the *use of co-operation*. It has pleased God, in the gifts of his grace and Spirit, to distribute them to his people in different kinds and measures. “To every one of us,” says the apostle, “is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” St. John, introduced in the text, might have different gifts from Peter, and grace of different operation. Or his appointment might be different also;—“if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” ‘thou art instructed for thyself by what death thou shalt glorify God,—in thine allotment follow me.’ Some are given as apostles, and some as evangelists, and some as prophets, and some as pastors and teachers. To some there is given the word of wisdom, to others the word of knowledge, to others faith, and different other bestowedments, according to the will of the Holy Ghost. But all is to work together “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come together, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto one perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Then shall the “whole body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, make increase

with the increase of God. Then shall the earth bring forth her harvest, and God, even our own God, shall give us his blessing. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the world shall fear him."

Finally, therefore, brethren, *follow Christ*. Let each of us obey his direction;—"follow thou me." As to our brethren, those that are such really, let us seek for grace to dwell together in unity;—let us walk by the same rule—let us mind the same thing. But as to all matters of mere curiosity—of merely creature-interest, and vain, carnal excitement—let us remember this reproof of Jesus,—"what is that to thee?" We have a great important work to do, and a solemn charge at the last to answer for. God will bring us into judgment. Our Lord will sit upon the throne. Before the glance of his countenance the earth and the heavens will flee away. He will search and try our hearts. And then it will be proven, before the universe, whether in simplicity and godly sincerity we have been followers of Jesus. Many, undoubtedly many, who will have professed his name and doctrine, will then be found "workers of iniquity," and the gates of glory will be closed upon them. And, brethren, perhaps we may say, that one of the bitterest dregs of all the punishment awarded at that day, will be the shame and confusion which will fall on the head of those misbelievers.

But let it be the end which we, each of us, live for, to follow Christ in sincerity, and so to be ready for his coming. Remember, this is every thing—the *religion of the heart*. The heart must be changed and converted. And none can do this but the Omnipotent Jehovah. All the Trinity of Godhead must unite in that achievement; and then it shall be accomplished. Then we shall live to the glory of Jesus here—be accounted at the last to be worthy to share in his resur-

rection,—and while the profane and ungodly, the half-disciple, the hypocrite, and the self-deceiver shall awake to everlasting contempt, we shall enter the kingdom of the Father—there to “shine bright as the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever.”

THE END.

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